Gay Rights & the Children

Midge Decter

E.L. Pattullo & Critics

Israel Watch: The Deportations David Bar-Illan

Reading Montaigne Joseph Epstein

The Rabbinic Imagination Hillel Halkin

Furtwängler & the Nazis Samuel Lipman

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Books in Review

Chester E. Finn, Jr. / Arch Puddington /
Jeffrey Marsh / Jerry Z. Muller / Angelo M. Codevilla

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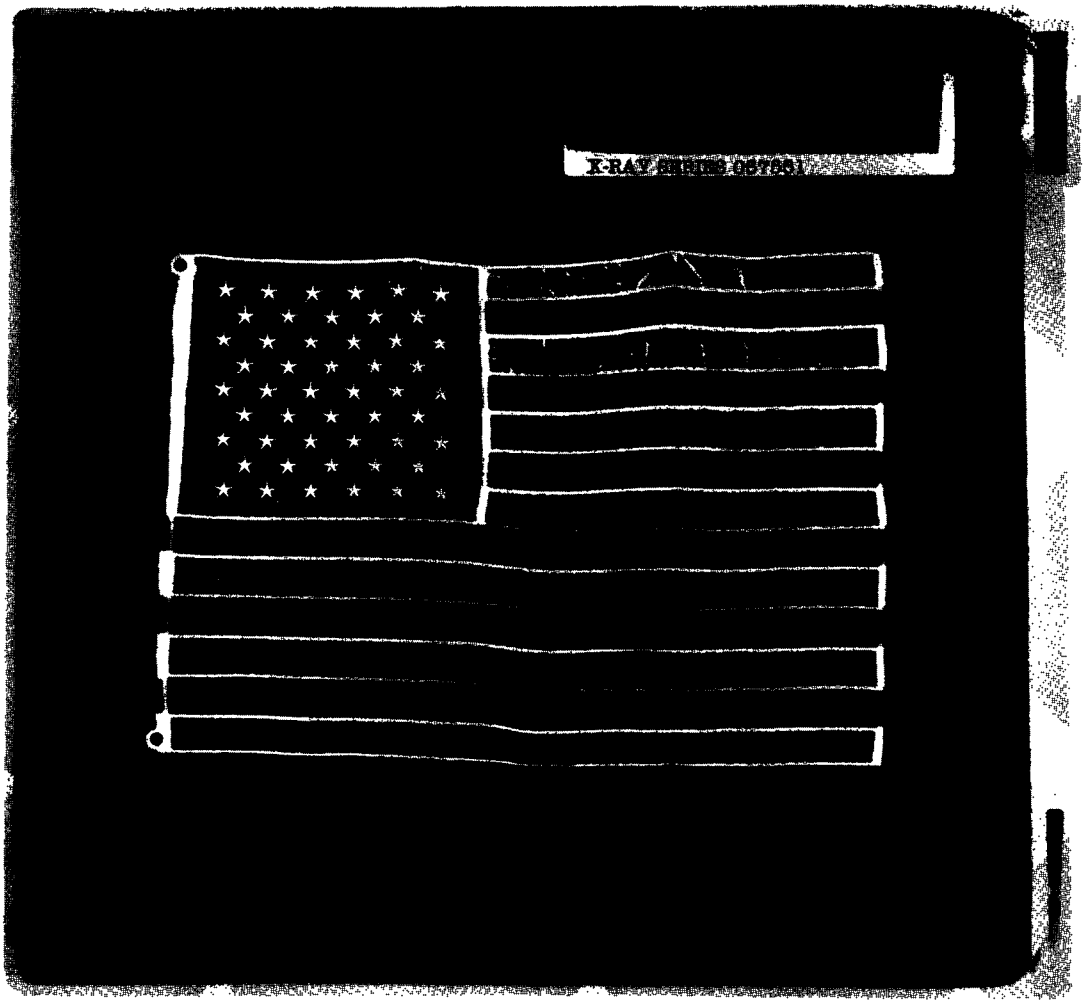

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VOLUME 95 NUMBER THREE *MARCH 1993*

Articles 19 Homosexuality and the Schools *Midge Decter*

26 The Rabbinic Imagination *Hillel Halkin*

34 Reading Montaigne *Joseph Epstein*

Israel Watch 41 The Deportations *David Bar-Illan*

Music 44 Furtwängler and the Nazis *Samuel Lipman*

Observations 49 American Stories *Evelyn Toynton*

Letters 2 Gay Rights

Bruce Bawer, John V.N. Philip, Peter John Kirsch, David Brill, James B. Heft, Samuel Schaal, Warren Johansson, William A. Percy, Ray Bono, Gregory J. King, Donald Hendricks, Elias J. Lieberman, Paul A. Siskind, Mark Adam Schnurman, Bert Thompson, George Jochnowitz, David Levinsohn, Kent Gordis, Harry V. Jaffa, David Shur, Charles W. Socarides, Frank S. Zepezauer, Robert Lyon, Eileen O'Brien, Tibor R. Machan, Susan Jordan, Maxwell S. Charleston, Robert J. Rosenthal, Patricia Meyerowitz, E.L. Pattullo

Books in Review 54 The Dream and the Nightmare, by Myron Magnet *Chester E. Finn, Jr.*

56 The Final Revolution, by George Weigel *Arch Puddington*

58 In Our Own Image, by Maureen Caudill; Artificial Life, by Steven Levy *Jeffrey Marsh*

61 The Jews of Germany, by Ruth Gay; The Stigma of Names, by Dietz Bering *Jerry Z. Muller*

63 At the Highest Levels, by Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott *Angelo M. Codevilla*

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Norman Podhoretz

Editor
Neal Kozodoy

Managing Editor: Marion Magid
Associate Editor: Brenda Brown

Publishing Director: Steven Pippin
Advertising Director: Sarah M. Stern

Assistant to the Editors: Denise Rosner

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Gay Rights

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

E.L. Pattullo's "Straight Talk About Gays" [December 1992] is anything but straight. Acknowledging that most people are by nature either heterosexual or homosexual, Mr. Pattullo hypothesizes that there are an indeterminate number of adults who might yet develop in either direction. He calls them "waverers" and suggests that they can be turned homosexual by "temptation." He defends the perpetuation of "legal and social distinctions between straights and gays" by arguing that such distinctions serve to keep waverers' temptations in check and to drive them firmly into the heterosexual camp, and thus serve society's "interest both in reproducing itself and in strengthening the institution of the family" and parents' "interest in reducing the risk that their children will become homosexual." After all, he says, "In a wholly nondiscriminatory world, the advantages of heterosexuality would not be obvious."

This argument is deeply and multiply flawed. First, to concede (as Mr. Pattullo does) that homosexuals have done nothing to deserve second-class status and then to defend the preservation of that status on any grounds strikes me as morally insupportable in a democratic society.

Second, the only objective reason why heterosexuality should be considered preferable to homosexuality is that heterosexuals are not the target of oppressive "legal and social distinctions."

Third, it is absurd to suggest that society's ability to "reproduc[e] itself" depends on coercing into marriage and parenthood people who, freed from legal and social constraints, would live in same-sex relationships.

Fourth, while it may well have an environmental component, sexual orientation is certainly fixed by early childhood, long before Mr. Pattullo's "legal and social distinctions" could have the coercive effect he desires.

Fifth, Mr. Pattullo's remarks on "temptation" defy logic. Sexual orientation is defined by urges, not actions: a man who is more tempted by homosexuality than heterosexuality *is* a homosexual. Even if there were a small number of people who remained sexually on the fence into adolescence or young adulthood, the present "legal and social distinctions" would not affect their ultimate orientation: such distinctions do not alter sexual urges, they only foster sexual neurosis.

Sixth, Mr. Pattullo defends his "waverer" category by pointing out that many adults have had sex with members of both sexes. This does not, however, mean that such people have "a capacity for becoming either straight or gay." What it means is that (a) in certain situations—military school, prison, long naval voyages—heterosexuals deprived of opposite-sex contact resort temporarily to same-sex intercourse; (b) in an atmosphere of oppressive "legal and social distinctions," many homosexuals deny or seek to change their homosexuality by engaging in heterosexual relationships; and (c) a small minority of people are genuinely bisexual. They are not waverers in Mr. Pattullo's sense, because they are not potentially either straight or gay: they are and always will be attracted to both sexes in roughly equal measure, and would fare best psychologically in a society in which they could settle down with whomever they loved, male or female, without feeling socially or legally pressured in either direction.

To be sure, there *is* a borderland between the straightforwardly gay and the unequivocally straight with which we should be concerned. Homosexuals often encounter inhabitants of this borderland. Any reasonably attractive gay man knows what it is like to be stared at with anxious longing by a dubious young daddy pushing a pram, or to drop into a gay bar after work and find himself the object of lewd, desperate overtures by a weepy, bibulous middle-aged husband.

Are these men waverers? No; they are homosexuals who have been driven by "legal and social distinctions" into playing it straight. Is this a good thing, for them or anybody? No. They are living a lie, condemning themselves to remorse, frustration, and loneliness, and (in pathetic attempts to conform to legally and socially sanctioned notions of the "family")

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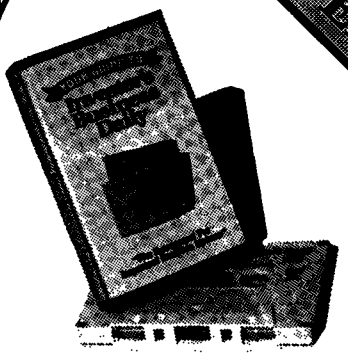

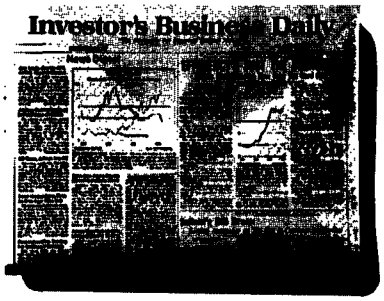

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creating households that are perched perpetually on the edge of disaster.

Some keep up the act forever. Many eventually crack under the pressure. Recently, after twenty years of marriage, a friend of mine with six sons was told by her husband that he's gay, that he'd been struggling against this fact and keeping silent about it all his life, and that he could no longer endure the feelings of guilt and alienation he had brought upon himself through his deception. The only segment of society that profited from his prolonged suppression of his homosexuality has been the psychology profession: all eight family members are now in therapy.

It is in the lives of families like this, whose situation is far more common than most heterosexuals realize, that one can observe some of the effects of Mr. Pattullo's "legal and social distinctions." We can thank those distinctions, too, for the extremely high suicide rate among gay teenagers (of which I have been acutely aware since my first openly gay friend killed himself in the wake of a favorite teacher's condemnation) and for the number of adolescent males from the South and Midwest who, rejected by their parents for being gay, nightly hawk their sexual services to married men down the block from my midtown Manhattan apartment.

It seems to me irresponsible, then, for any discussion of the inequities visited upon homosexuals to invoke the conjectural interests of the "institution of the family" while ignoring the circumstances of actual families. It seems cruel to defend those inequities by making unrealistic claims about their containment of homosexuality while disregarding the profound, often deadly, damage that those inequities cause in the lives of countless very real people. And it seems outrageous to reinforce the myth that parents can "reduc[e] the risk that their children will become homosexual." Above all, what parents must be helped to understand is that they *cannot* reduce this "risk." What they *can* reduce dramatically, however, by the simple act of raising their children not to draw oppressive distinctions between straight and gay, is the risk that those children, if they do discover themselves to be homosexual, will despise the idea so much as to be incapable of facing it honestly and living with it responsibly.

BRUCE BAWER

New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I welcome the balanced tone of E.L. Pattullo's contribution to the gay-rights debate even if, as a gay man and someone who considers himself conservative on many issues, I must respectfully disagree with most of his conclusions.

Mr. Pattullo argues that many people, among them children, waver in determining their sexual orientation. Over time, conscious and unconscious factors lead them to choose a straight or gay life as, in analogous fashion, they choose their adult characters. Society's interest in reproducing itself and protecting the family justifies limited discrimination by organizations such as adoption agencies, schools, and scouting organizations clearly to signal waverers that heterosexuality is preferred.

It is inconceivable to me that the overwhelming majority of individuals, consciously or unconsciously, choose, in any understandable sense of that word, their sexual orientation. Far more convincing is the statement the author attributes to John Money of Johns Hopkins: that sexuality is most similar to right- or left-handedness, a behavioral patterning qualitatively different from any concept of choice.

Even assuming waverers did exist in large numbers, conservatives should not support laws and social attitudes that champion heterosexuality and inevitably taint gay people as socially less valuable. The sanctity of the individual is fundamental to conservatism, as is the recognition that each person realizing his or her fullest potential serves society's greatest interest. Coming to terms with my own homosexuality as an undergraduate was an unalloyed personal blessing, freeing me for the adult task of becoming a responsible citizen. The vast majority of heterosexuals who bear children ensure physical reproduction. And a climate of full acceptance immeasurably strengthens the extended family by allowing all its members to contribute to our primary collective familial responsibility, the generational transmission of values.

Mr. Pattullo endorses blanket proscriptions against gay people as adopting parents and discrimination by schools and youth organizations that serve no valid societal purpose and cruelly incapacitate the many responsible homosexual men and women who seek to fulfill the deeply felt parental impulses we all share in exactly these ways. Surely the rational alternative, particularly for a conservative, is to handle these situations on the same case-by-case basis that Mr. Pattullo correctly proposes for other situations.

These are culturally confusing times in our beloved America for many conservatives and for many among the society at large. Mr. Pattullo's greatest contribution is to continue the gay-rights debate among reasonable people. In this way conservatives, as well as the rest of the country, will some day reach consensus on this issue, currently so daunting to so many.

JOHN V.N. PHILIP

New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . E.L. Pattullo offers a series of quasi-scientific assertions most of which are unsubstantiated by medical or psychological research, and all of which are qualified by disclaimers which indemnify him from accusations of scientific disingenuousness. The result: an article that is long on subtly-propounded homophobia and short on those objective and scientific data which might support his theses.

As a physician, I must question his scientific integrity; as an American, I must question his (and your) motives in offering us this article; as a homosexual, I must protest your having published an article in which politico-social bias masquerades as science.

PETER JOHN KIRSCH, M.D.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I found E.L. Pattullo's article an honest and sincere attempt to find a position which eschews intolerance toward gay people without condoning homosexuality. However, his argument that government neutrality . . . would foster "moral equivalence" which, subsequently, could lead wavering youth into homosexuality, simply does not hold up. Neutrality, in fact, is exactly the position the government of a democracy should take regarding private sexual conduct between consenting adults.

Should the government actively engage in discouraging homosexu-

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ality, the results could only perpetuate the bigotry and violence Mr. Pattullo condemns. Moreover, . . . when schoolteachers are fired or blackmailed because of their private lives, it only strengthens the argument that homosexuals need legal protection as a class—an outcome certainly far more undesirable, from Mr. Pattullo's point of view, than simple neutrality.

But it is really the heart of Mr. Pattullo's argument that needs to be scrutinized: that pressure and stigma should be applied to steer wavering youth into heterosexuality. Alas, there are too many sad cases documenting futile attempts to overcome homosexuality through marriage. And it is these very men who wind up causing the greatest social harm, for it is they who can be found hanging out in men's rooms or other disreputable locales, hunting for furtive sex and then scurrying home to their wives in the suburbs. Is this truly better for society?

DAVID BRILL

New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . E.L. Pattullo agrees that some of us are straight and some of us are gay (or, presumably, lesbian). But some of us are in between. The Kinsey scale is a method for describing this. According to this scale, 0 represents those of us who are exclusive heterosexuals, 6 represents exclusive homosexuals, and 3 represents true bisexuals. A 1 is a heterosexual with some slight homosexual interest and/or experience; a 5 is a homosexual with some slight heterosexual interest or experience; and 2's and 4's represent more than slight interest or experience.

This scale has some problems: it is difficult to obtain accurate scientific data on experience; it is almost impossible to obtain reliable scientific data on feelings, dreams, fantasies, or other similar interests. Nevertheless, it gives us a way to discuss the problem.

Mr. Pattullo suggests that those growing children (and, for that matter, some older, even married, adults) who find themselves somewhere between 0 and 6 are waverers (his term) and thus susceptible of being "pushed" (some would say "recruited") by either camp. He further suggests that firm but gentle anti-gay discrimination would prevent this push into the gay camp.

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Those "West Bank" Settlements

Are they *really* the "greatest obstacle to peace"?

Not too long ago, then Secretary of State James Baker made the astonishing comment that Israeli settlements in Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") were the greatest obstacle to peace in the Middle East. This claim is constantly being repeated; many have come to accept it as truth. Could Mr. Baker possibly be right? It's a serious accusation and it deserves examination.

What are the facts?

A recap of history. Some thumbnail history may be in order. Large numbers of Jews have been living in these territories since biblical times. Most of the Arabs living there are in fact relative newcomers. "Palestine" is the entire area now covered by Israel, including Judea/Samaria (the so-called "West Bank") *and* what is now the Kingdom of Jordan. It originally also included the Golan Heights, which later, in an agreement between England and France, were ceded to France, and to Syria as the successor in possession. In 1922, contrary to the Mandate of the League of Nations, the British severed the entire area east of the Jordan and gave it to the Hashemite Arabs for their assistance in World War I. Thus, fully 75% of Palestine, all of which under the Mandate and under the terms of the Balfour Declaration was meant to be a homeland for the Jewish people, was lost for that purpose. Only the area west of the Jordan was left for Jewish settlement.

"Why should the Arab countries and the 'West Bank' be the only places in the world where Jews are not allowed to live?"

How the West Bank became "Arab country". In 1947, after decades of strife between Arabs and Jews, the British decided to relinquish the Mandate. The UN stepped in and proposed a partition plan under which the country (west of the River) was to be divided into respective Arab and Jewish areas. Jerusalem was to be internationalized. The Jews accepted the plan; the Arabs refused it out of hand. In 1948, on the twice truncated territory allotted to them by the U.N., the Jews declared their independence, and the state of Israel was born. On the same day, six Arab armies invaded the new-born state. In what can be described as an almost biblical miracle, the Jews defeated them. When an armistice was finally secured, however, TransJordan remained in possession of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and the eastern part of Jerusalem; Egypt remained in possession of the Gaza Strip. TransJordan then renamed itself Jordan.

The Six-Day War. Once in possession of the "West Bank" and East Jerusalem, the Jordanians promptly proceeded to expel all Jews and systematically to desecrate and to destroy most Jewish sacred places, cemeteries and houses of worship. No Jews, regardless of citizenship were allowed into the "West Bank" or East Jerusalem, the locale of the Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism. In 1967, Egyptian president Abdel Nasser joined by the same array of Arab armies that had unsuccessfully tried to destroy Israel at its birth in 1948, launched another war against Israel "to drive the Jews into the sea" and into oblivion, once and for all. But the Israelis utterly defeated the combined Arab might in the 6-Day War, one of the greatest military victories in history. When the dust of war settled, the Israelis had not only retained their national territory, but had repossessed the territories of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank"), the eastern part of Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and had occupied the vast Sinai Peninsula.

It is clear from this abbreviated history that the Israeli claim to the "West Bank" is far stronger than that of the Arabs. About 100,000 Jews now live there. And why shouldn't they? Why should the Arab countries and the "West Bank" be the only places in the whole wide world where Jews are not allowed to live? How can 100,000 Jews living among 700,000 Arabs be the "greatest threat to peace"? How can our government be concerned about a new settlement of a few mobile homes on some barren Judean hills as the "greatest threat to peace", when we seem to be oblivious and totally unconcerned about the unrelenting hostility of the Arab countries, the de facto incorporation of Lebanon by Syria, the Scuds and chemical weapons still remaining in Iraq, and the relentless and ominous build-up of Syria's missile forces?

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Mr. Pattullo admits this is speculation. While it seems reasonable to suppose that someone might waver between being, for instance, a 2 and a 3, there is absolutely *no* scientific data to support the concept that someone might waver between 0 and 6. Has Mr. Pattullo ever spoken to such a person? I have spoken to dozens of gay men and lesbian women; I have never met such a person.

I have spoken to many people who were unsure of their own sexuality, even well into their adult years. None of them was pushed into being gay by the permissiveness of friends, parents, or society. Many, as Mr. Pattullo writes, accepted their sexual orientation *despite* the hatred and discrimination of society.

But even if the waverers, as Mr. Pattullo speculates, did exist, what evidence does he have that giving children "clear, repeated signals as to society's preference" would have any influence on their final sexual orientation? I gave my son such "clear, repeated signals." All this accomplished was delaying his sharing his sexual orientation with us. Fortunately, his counsel was more valuable than all my years of medical training, and of reading COMMENTARY, in overcoming my own homophobia.

I belong to P-FLAG, a national organization of parents, family, and friends of lesbian, gay, and bisexual children. This includes some (straight) children of gays. *None* of us "pushed" our children into being gay. . . . Happily, most of us matured. Some of us are even now "coming out of the closet."

Mr. Pattullo suggests that his approach would do no harm, and that we should not "risk" abandoning some form of anti-gay discrimination. I disagree. What about the 30 percent (at least) of teenage suicides thought to be gay-related? At least half of these are believed to be related to rejection by family or peers. Encouraging "family values," as suggested by the former Secretary of Health and Human Services, Louis Sullivan, is worthless; I think Mr. Pattullo would agree to that.

Let me make a positive suggestion. Instead of creating more hate-filled homophobic heterosexuals, let us seek to teach our children the meaning of love. To paraphrase Bishop Melvin Wheately, love that is self-centered, selfish, exploitative, whether heterosexual or homosexual, is to be deplored. And love that is unselfish, caring, mutual, and respectful, whether between straights or gays, is desirable. If we teach that to our children, we all win.

I thank Mr. Pattullo for bringing this discussion to the pages of COMMENTARY. And I thank him for the kind things he said about those of us who are loving, supportive parents of gay children. . . . There are conservative Jewish (former) Republicans who have gay children. Some of us are your readers.

If you choose to publish all or part of my letter, please do not use my name. I do not fear recrimination against me, but against my son. There are hateful people out there. Please just sign me:

A PHYSICIAN

Memphis, Tennessee

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . In his demeaning and unsubstantiated article, E.L. Pattullo has developed an entire theory without any practical experience or evidence. The fact that he has some belief or fear does not make it a reality. In an era when homosexuality was a deep dark secret, his theory of forced heterosexual conversion to homosexuality had many adherents. Today it sounds silly. . . .

I am not a homosexual nor am I an investigative reporter. However, as Bob Dylan says, you don't need a weatherman to tell which way the wind blows. Clearly there is something wrong with Mr. Pattullo's continual references to his homosexual friend. Doesn't he have more confirmation than this? More importantly, doesn't he have an obligation to defend his opinion with something more substantial than his own beliefs or the fact that others may have the same opinion?

It should be noted that there is practical evidence which invalidates the belief system presented in Mr. Pattullo's article. Recently on television, there was a discussion to the effect that even with the best intentions and psychological help, homosexuals really cannot switch their identity. There are numerous programs on cable TV dedicated to homosexuals and lesbians. All state that they have experienced their sexuality since childhood. None speaks of forced conversion. The bottom line is that you really cannot make people into something they are not inclined to be. The forced-conversion idea is more myth than reality. . . .

In Salem, Massachusetts, they burned witches. Today, hopefully, we do not have to act on our fears. If you expand the freedom of one group, you expand everyone's freedom. Why don't we just do it? If there are actual problems upon the granting of freedom to gays, then the actual majority of people can make actual legislative adjustments to address all real concerns.

JAMES B. HEFT

New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Concerning E.L. Pattullo's assertion that society should promote heterosexuality over homosexuality—imagine a world which promoted *homosexuality* over *heterosexuality*. A world where television sitcoms were about gay people, where gays could get married but not straights, where the church or temple would bless only gay unions, not marriages between people of the (ugh) *opposite* sex. According to Mr. Pattullo, a young person growing up in this world would assuredly become homosexual.

But of course the real world is exactly the opposite. I was raised by two heterosexuals in a world where heterosexuality was presented as the *only* option. Even though I was aware, from the age of twelve, that I was gay, I was so convinced of the superiority of heterosexuality that I dutifully dated throughout high school and college and finally married a woman and later had two wonderful children.

But at age thirty-five, even though I had applied virtually all my energies toward being heterosexual since reaching puberty 23 years earlier, I realized that I was gay and that all that energy and all of society's promotion had not changed my sexual orientation one bit. Nor would it. Only since (reluctantly) leaving the marriage has my life blossomed because I am living as I was created. (And, I would add, as I think God has created me.)

Mr. Pattullo's presuppositions are based more on cultural bias than on common sense, as if a society which affirmed gays would become gay. That is absurd. Everything we know of sexual orientation, of whatever variety, tells us

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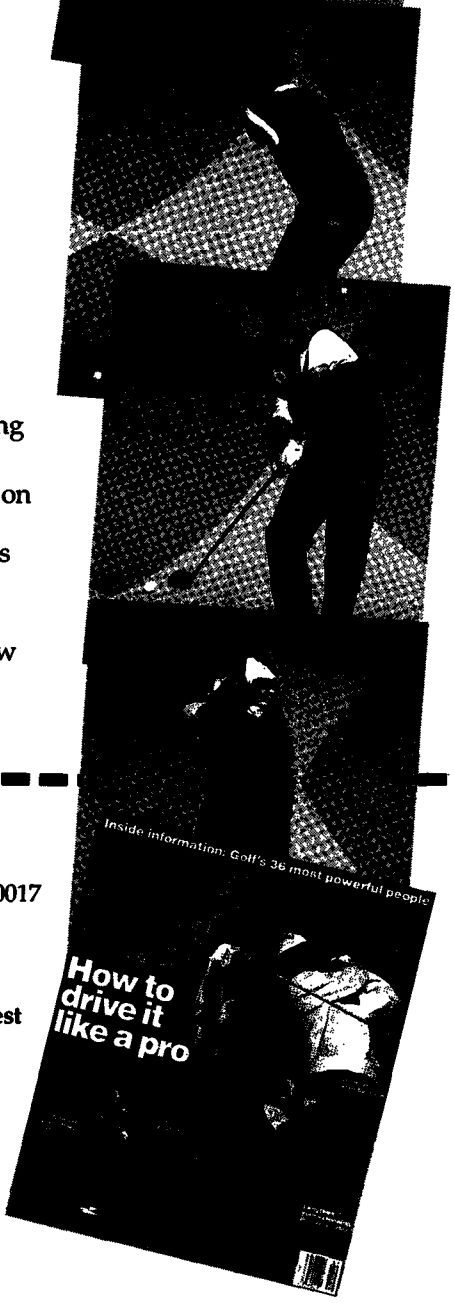

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that it is deeply rooted, intractable, and that whether or not society promotes one over the other, people will be what they will be. Mr. Pattullo can relax: as history down through the millennia shows, society remains mostly heterosexual. . . .

SAMUEL SCHAAL
Dallas, Texas

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

E.L. Pattullo reiterates many of the longstanding prejudices against lovers of their own sex . . . with a more modern rationale. . . . That the young will "succumb to the temptations of homosexuality in a social climate that [is] entirely evenhanded in its treatment of the two orientations" has as much plausibility as the belief voiced well into the last century that some Christians might succumb to the temptations of Judaism in a social climate that was entirely evenhanded in its treatment of the two religions.

If the death penalty—reinforced by merciless ostracism of the offender and his family—did not prevent individuals from becoming homosexual in past centuries, how can mere exclusion from the Boy Scouts accomplish that purpose? If a relentless censorship that withheld from the young every trace of the existence of lovers of their own sex—even in histories of Greece and Rome—did not preclude the enlightened from learning that some of the most famous men and women of all time were homosexual or bisexual, how then can refusal of a high school to allow a gay student organization keep its charges ignorant of their sexual feelings and isolated from one another? Such precautions can have no more real effect than personal acts of rudeness and ostracism which self-respecting "queer nationals" take in stride every day of their lives.

So, far from being an unqualified misfortune, a homosexual orientation is a burden, a stimulus, and a challenge to those who discover it within themselves. It entails a radical reorientation of one's private life, though not necessarily of one's public career. If it closes certain potential paths, it opens others—which may just as easily lead to success. No sexual orientation is a bed of roses, and the sooner Western society learns this fact and resolves to diminish the problems and obstacles that every one of its members encounters in search of sexual satisfaction, the better it will be for us all.

WARREN JOHANSSON
Gay Academic Union
New York City

WILLIAM A. PERCY
University of Massachusetts
Boston, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . I am unpersuaded by E.L. Pattullo's arguments. Now, he seems not an unkind person; in his article he even tests his position with counterarguments, and his tone generally is sympathetic. He is not unlettered, either, as his former directorship of Harvard's Center for Behavioral Sciences attests. But his stance is based on no logic that I can descry. Underlying his contentions, I fear, are just his personal prejudices and *petitio principii*. He takes much too much for granted.

Why, for instance—if we can be objective about it—must we all wring our hands over society's reproductive capacity and the persistence of the family as now constituted? Reproduction is at base a neutral biological propensity as common to cockroaches and slime mold as to human beings. Similarly, the family, far from possessing some glowing innate majesty, is often the locus of some of the most exploitative behavior we ever inflict on one another. If Mr. Pattullo wishes to glamorize these and append to them a moral imperative, he is certainly free to do so. But must everyone?

Reason, which he several times invokes, tells me that the human race is nowhere near extinction. . . . Can the presence of fully enfranchised homosexuals, however non-procreative and "tempting" (Mr. Pattullo's recurrent formulation) their life-style, truly imperil the survival of the species and the social fabric—more than plague, inquisition, war, and revolution? Do homosexuals really have the power to undermine the institution of the family more than our technological excesses, academic effeteness, and sorry appetite for material aggrandizement?

Certainly a community will have its vested interests. Curiously, however, what the author's heterosexual community aims most strenuously to deny homosexuals is the right to take part in and thus perpetuate the very traditions it deems essential to the general welfare: a legally and socially sanctioned marriage to a solemnly pledged partner (which self-contradicting society never denies heterosexual couples who cannot or will not reproduce); the raising of children (whether their biological offspring or adopted); secure, fulfilling employment; service in the armed forces; and full acceptance in their chosen religious organizations.

Does extending the embrace of a tradition to outsiders necessarily weaken, rather than embellish and validate, the tradition? Well, perhaps Mr. Pattullo suspects homosexuals of a saboteur's insincerity, of mischievous motives, of a plot to desecrate and destroy all things holy. He assuredly does appear to believe those holy things mighty fragile—as fragile as the connection his waverers have to their heterosexuality, which he views as so susceptible to homosexual short-circuiting. Of this susceptibility he offers no evidence, no clear illustration, not even . . . a statistic, as he offers none for his other assertions. Their cogency we must accept on faith.

A faith recumbent on preconceived notions, inadmissive of proof, has little to do with the "reasonable discussion" Mr. Pattullo wishes to encourage. It has more to do with intellectual ambiguity, presumption, personal preference, in-groups, and out-groups. It has everything to do with what his title promises: "straight talk" . . . talk that represents the straight majority's particular and partial interpretation of reality; that is, heterosexual subjectivity, hardly a speck more.

Nowhere does the author demonstrate that homosexuality—regardless of how his community reacts to it—is not in itself inherently good. I would venture further that homosexuality can possess as much goodness, beauty, and sanctity as heterosexuality can, and that this is worth fighting for and, if necessary in this unfair world, suffering for.

The recognition of this by statute and society is not to be prorogued by circumlocution, recourse to questionable logic, and frettings over some dreaded adverse effect on human breeding potentials and the happy home. Humanity is more than that.

RAY BONO
Albany, New York

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TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

The assertion by E.L. Pattullo that discrimination against gay and lesbian Americans is "best handled by allowing individuals and institutions to act as they will—within the civil-rights [*sic*] boundaries that currently protect everyone, gay and straight alike," reflects a misunderstanding of the lack of civil-rights protection currently enjoyed by lesbian and gay Americans.

As a member of the Human Rights Campaign Fund, the nation's largest lesbian and gay political group, I would like to inform Mr. Pattullo that our courts have consistently ruled that lesbian and gay people do not enjoy the right to file suit on the grounds of discrimination in jurisdictions that have no lesbian and gay civil-rights laws on the books. Currently, only seven states make it illegal to discriminate against lesbian and gay people in employment, housing, and public accommodations.

Thus, most lesbian and gay people who lose their homes, their jobs, their insurance, or their medical care because of discrimination—events that occur on a daily basis in the United States—are unable to assert that their basic civil rights have been denied them.

Moreover, given the pervasive climate of anti-gay bigotry in many sections of the country, lesbian and gay Americans who have experienced discrimination or have been the victims of hate crimes are unwilling to call public attention to their plight. Having been discriminated against once, they fear the danger of being discriminated against again by calling attention to themselves. We are deluding ourselves if we believe that current law offers these individuals any sense of security or protection. That is why most Americans, if polls are to be believed, support laws to protect all people, including lesbians and gay men, from unfair acts of discrimination.

Mr. Pattullo admits to "ambivalence about the appropriate role for gays in a straight society." Might I suggest that one way to begin dealing with this issue is to admit that we do not live in a "straight" society any more than we live in a "white" society or a "Protestant" society. While certainly the majority of people in American society are heterosexual, we share our communities and our lives with many people who are not. As a gay man with 35 nieces and nephews, my concern is that we build a society that values all of their lives, whether they are heterosexual, homosexual, or waverers, as Mr. Pattullo inelegantly defines them. In the long run, we will be better off when we begin to understand our diversity as a source of strength rather than as a problem that utilizes discrimination as a cure.

GREGORY J. KING
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

E.L. Pattullo makes too facile a connection between a fixed code of sexual morals and opposition to the "gay life-style." Rock and rap lyrics, which owe no allegiance to religious scruples, are nonetheless infamous for their homophobia. On the other hand, the Catholic bishops of Oregon campaigned against Measure 9, which sought to proclaim homosexuality "unnatural" and "perverse." As the case of Woody Allen shows, what society may tolerate in actual sexual conduct is not necessarily what it accepts in theory. . . .

Further, Mr. Pattullo's use of "gay" as synonymous with "homosexual" in the title of his article reflects the same dangerous ambiguity as President Clinton's distinction between "preference" and "action" in deciding whether homosexuals should serve in the armed forces. The British experience with the Wolfenden formula legalizing "private actions between consenting adults" illustrates the need for precision in this matter. . . . "Private" ruled out "importuning," the behavior here known as "cruising," and "adult" meant over twenty-one, which resulted in a tripling of the conviction rate of homosexuals. Despite the attempts of homosexuals to amend these points, the very legislation which sought to reform an unsatisfactory legal system remained in many ways unsatisfactory to homosexuals.

Instead of the majority worrying about waverers becoming trapped into a minority, the recent referendum in Colorado, where the legislation passed in a few areas was, in effect, repealed by making it conform to the norms of the entire state, suggests that the minority should be concerned about the majority wavering in its tolerance

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because it had never thought through precisely what it was prepared to tolerate.

[Reverend] DONALD HENDRICKS
Yonkers, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . Apart from a brief reference to the need for the human species to procreate (notwithstanding the population explosion) and the need to "strengthen the institution of the family," nowhere does E.L. Pattullo tell us *why* heterosexuality is to be preferred to homosexuality. Does he have an answer other than societal "preference"? . . .

Mr. Pattullo mentions society's interest in maintaining the institution of the family in such a way that it is apparent that he means a family with a heterosexual couple at its core. Why? I know many families which would not meet that definition and yet I know them to be families in the truest sense of the word: a community closely bound by love, caring, and support. Some are straight, some are gay; some have children, some do not or cannot; some are single-parent families. Should society be less interested in these families because they do not fit a heterosexual mold? . . .

"Children," he writes, "are cruel, and just as short or unathletic or homely boys and girls suffer for their state, so would those who differ in sexual preference"—which is *precisely* the value of education: to teach our children the harm done by such prejudices, many of which, I am convinced, are taught rather than instinctual. . . .

The most alarming statement Mr. Pattullo makes comes at the end of his article. Referring to sexual development, he writes, ". . . we dare not risk failing to give children clear, repeated signals as to *society's preference*" (emphasis added). What a thoroughly dangerous idea! It is painfully obvious to me as a Jew that much of the world has, for millennia, deemed Jews to be marginal. Indeed, it has told us that society prefers that we *not* be Jews . . . or not *be* at all. Should I, therefore, teach my three-year-old son that he should not live his life as a Jew because Western society prefers Christians and Christianity?

A society ruled by intolerance should no more dictate that decision than it should attempt to convince a waverer that a heterosexual orientation is to be preferred to a homosexual one. If my son grows up and detaches himself from our Jewish tradition I will be profoundly disappointed because I feel he will lose all of the richness I associate with the Jewish tradition. If, in his development, he discovers himself to be gay, I will be disappointed only because I know that the society in which he is growing up is not yet the society which can set aside its fears and prejudices to allow homosexuals simply to be who they know themselves to be.

I do not regard Mr. Pattullo as a homophobe or a bigot, but I do find his thesis chilling and I do wonder what is *really* bothering him. Perhaps it is the discomfort all of us feel when we see societal mores in transition. He would concretize the prejudice of the past and accept it as something innately human. I prefer a conception rooted in Jewish tradition which suggests that each of us is created in God's image and, as a consequence, we must work hard to get past our prejudices to discover the God-like in each person.

[Rabbi] ELIAS J. LIEBERMAN
Falmouth Jewish Congregation
East Falmouth, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

COMMENTARY readers, particularly Jewish readers, should find much that is disturbing in the logic and assumptions underlying E.L. Pattullo's article in defense of discrimination against homosexuals. . . .

The frightening ramifications of Mr. Pattullo's argument become readily apparent if one makes the analogy to being Jewish in a predominantly non-Jewish culture. Jews have throughout history faced similar sorts of difficulties for being different from the norm, and it has often been (and, in some areas, may still be) desirable to change one's religious beliefs in order to fit into the predominant culture. If the predominant culture considers Judaism to be a cultural disadvantage, does this justify discrimination against Jews as a means for society to dissuade children from growing up to be Jewish? Should Jewish parents so dissuade their children as a means of making their futures less of a burden? Having survived the Holocaust, Jews, perhaps more than most, should realize the dangerous ramifications of these sorts of attitudes. . . .

Mr. Pattullo also flippantly conflates and/or dismisses a number of important concepts. He asserts that sexual orientation, being possibly shaped by postnatal environmental forces, is thus not deserving of civil-rights protection. Following this reasoning, one's religious beliefs, which similarly develop postnatally, should likewise be a justifiable basis for discrimination.

Mr. Pattullo also claims that even if society in general were to become more tolerant of gay people, children, being innately cruel to those who are different, will nonetheless continue to mistreat gay and lesbian children; he considers this a justification for not even bothering to attempt to create a more tolerant societal environment. Does he also suggest that teachers and parents should likewise ignore racist, sexist, or anti-Jewish comments made by children just because attending to them might be futile? Social tolerance is fostered during all stages in life, and indeed lessons learned in childhood help shape ideas held as an adult; homophobia should not be tolerated in children any more than other forms of bigotry.

It thus becomes quite apparent that behind a façade of supposed objectivity, Mr. Pattullo's arguments are no more than a rehashing of hackneyed and debunked theories about homosexuality as a simple learned behavior. His line of reasoning, however, becomes truly frightening when considered in the light of the historical experiences of other marginalized populations, such as Jews. Indeed, the lessons of the Holocaust should teach us all the dire ramifications of fostering intolerance and discrimination as a means of societal engineering. Thoughtful readers should thus recognize the dangers inherent in Mr. Pattullo's argument, and come to understand the need to counter, rather than foster, the intolerance and discrimination that gay and lesbian people face in today's society.

PAUL A. SISKIND
Minneapolis, Minnesota

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . E.L. Pattullo's "Straight Talk About Gays" . . . only reinforces prejudice and intolerance. . . .

We do not even know for certain whether sexual orientation is

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caused by a combination of prenatal and postnatal factors or by prenatal factors alone. Mr. Pattullo says analogies to race and sex are inapposite because race and sex are determined purely by prenatal factors.

Personal religious beliefs depend both on prenatal and postnatal influences. Children born to Jewish parents are predisposed to be Jewish, although they retain a certain degree of autonomy with regard to their ultimate religious orientation. Perhaps we should, as a society, promote distinctions between Christians and Jews. We need only discriminate against Jews in certain ways, so that individuals unsure of their religious orientation will tend to gravitate toward Christianity. After all, as a nation we have a vested interest in promoting a homogeneous society. Additionally, we must not run the risk of having our society tainted by the impurity of Jewish beliefs.

Perhaps my analogy produces a more visceral response than Mr. Pattullo's article. When put in a more identifiable form, the odious nature of Mr. Pattullo's views becomes readily apparent.

MARK ADAM SCHNURMAN
Columbus, Ohio

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

E.L. Pattullo calls for a variety of second-class treatment of lesbians and gay men on the grounds that "explicit evidence of society's bias against homosexuality is an important element in the process by which many children become straight adults." Social bias against gay people is not any such thing, however, and Mr. Pattullo does not even try to submit any supportive evidence. A person's sexual orientation is, in fact, fixed no later than infancy. No amount of speculation about waverers or reliance on the twin myths of choice and seduction can justify special pleading on behalf of anti-gay bigotry.

. . . Who should know more about the danger of restricting minority rights in the name of "society" than Jews? Encouraging social bias against gay men and women will not turn gay youth into heterosexuals, but it will encourage those who fire gay people from their jobs and those who assault, maim, and kill them. Stop it, COMMENTARY; just stop it.

BERT THOMPSON
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

As E.L. Pattullo tells us, "There is much we do not know about human sexuality, especially on the all-important issue of how sexual orientation is determined." We also do not know how prevalent homosexuality is, or how it is related to other—nonsexual—aspects of human behavior.

Some time ago, I noted that a great many obituaries (articles, not death notices) in the *New York Times* listed AIDS as a cause of death. I decided to keep a record and did so from June 30 through October 11, 1992. There were 697 obituaries during that period, 47 of which explicitly mentioned AIDS as the cause of death. One of the AIDS victims was a female; one case was the result of a transfusion. Most of the rest, presumably, were male homosexuals.

These figures, of course, prove nothing. There are no explicit criteria for meriting an obituary in the *Times*. Nor do we know what percentage of gay men die of AIDS. Nevertheless, a percentage of roughly 6.5 AIDS deaths in the total population seems higher than chance. Is there a link between homosexuality and productivity? Perhaps this is a question worth investigating.

GEORGE JOCHNOWITZ
College of Staten Island
Staten Island, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . It is not possible to address the bulk of E.L. Pattullo's article, which deals with the question of why some people become gay—it is much too muddled. . . . [But] at the end, the article emerges from a muddle to become a cop-out because the author does not tell us just what "distinctions" or "signals" we should retain in order to provide an effective deterrent to the choice of homosexuality or bisexuality. He seems to be against society's "irrational hatred of homosexuals" as well as "gay-baiting and gay-bashing." If we are looking for "clear, repeated signals" as deterrents, what could be more to the point? What about job discrimination? Housing discrimination? Admission to university? Indeed, what about castration? If there were a Nobel Prize awarded

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for creating unmistakable "distinctions" and emitting "clear, repeated signals," surely John Wayne Gacy and Jeffrey Dahmer have to be leading candidates.

It seems to me that this article is neither here nor there . . . because it will not or cannot tell us what the author thinks are appropriate measures to deter waverers from making undesirable choices. After all, one might feel one way if the article recommended the rack or burning at the stake; and quite another way if it recommended taking away a child's marbles or forbidding the use of his Nintendo. What does Mr. Pattullo have in mind? . . .

DAVID LEVINSOHN
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

The greatest interest in E.L. Pattullo's poorly reasoned article is the fact that it appeared in COMMENTARY. Mr. Pattullo seems only dimly aware of what is at stake in the conflict over homosexuality. Is homosexuality a vice which is harmful to individuals and which undermines society, or is it a harmless life-style like, say, being a vegetarian? If homosexuality is a perfectly legitimate life-style, then those who discriminate against homosexuals are bigots and they should be educated and, if necessary, coerced to behave tolerantly. If homosexuality is a vice, on the contrary, society has an obligation to reprove and suppress this behavior.

Mr. Pattullo does not address the morality of "gay rights" which apparently he considers self-evident. The "few pockets of resistance" to the campaign for gay rights, he writes, stem "almost entirely from religious considerations," and, he continues, "Protestant evangelicals were behind the extremist move to proclaim homosexuality 'abnormal, wrong, unnatural, and perverse'" in an Oregon initiative which, he adds, "was rightly defeated."

That may be the way it looks in Cambridge or in the editorial board room of the *New York Times*, but I think it is safe to say that there are substantial numbers of people, of both religious and secular outlooks, who consider homosexuality a vice. And if it is a vice, how else to characterize it than as "abnormal, wrong, unnatural, and perverse." . . .

Mr. Pattullo does not address the issue of the morality of homosexual behavior. But when he enjoins us to "rid society of irrational prejudice against gays," he is clearly expressing his opinion that homosexual behavior is perfectly legitimate. He reveals his moral opinions in the typical universalist jargon of modern liberalism, for which preferred imperatives flow directly from reason, and from which it follows that those who disagree are "irrational."

But here Mr. Pattullo's article makes a curious digression. He raises the question as to whether homosexuality is innate . . . and concludes that in the case of humans we cannot really be certain. Therefore, ". . . it is a good bet that substantial numbers of children have the capacity to grow in either direction." From this modest speculation Mr. Pattullo draws the major conclusions of his article, . . . which, because they are presumably "conservative," explain why it appeared in COMMENTARY rather than in the *New Republic*. The problem is that none of Mr. Pattullo's conclusions follows from his premises.

We may dismiss the argument that society's "interest in reproducing itself" could justify discrimination against homosexuals. First, because homosexuals can reproduce and second, because, in Mr. Pattullo's words, ". . . if overpopulation continues to threaten the planet, gay adults might become more socially valuable than straight ones." (This statement is particularly puzzling since it asserts that overpopulation *is* threatening the planet, from which it would seem to follow that gays are *already* more socially valuable than straights.)

All the other conclusions drawn by Mr. Pattullo are unwarranted if one assumes, as he does, that there is nothing illegitimate in homosexual behavior. Thus, society would have no justification for "strengthening the institution of the [monogamous, heterosexual] family" unless this institution were superior to alternative sexual arrangements. The gay-rights movement is perfectly correct in asserting that if homosexuality is legitimate, there is no reason why a family consisting of bonded homosexuals should be disadvantaged.

Similarly, unless there is something wrong with homosexuality, policies which take into account parents' "interest in reducing the risk that their children will become homosexual" or which "ensure that all children clearly understand the desirability of growing up to be heterosexual adults" would be nothing other than pandering to the "irrational prejudice" which Mr. Pattullo assures us he wishes to expunge. . . .

Further, Mr. Pattullo's explicit premise, that we cannot be sure whether homosexuality is innate, is irrelevant. Even in the unlikely event that a "queer" gene were to be discovered, the issue of the morality or immorality of homosexual behavior would not be resolved. . . . If an "anti-Semitic" gene were discovered, would we then alter our public-school curriculum to teach six-year-olds to respect anti-Semites?

Irrespective of any biological, psychological, or sociological accounts of human sexuality, societal discrimination against homosexuals is justified if and only if homosexuality is a vice. That is the question. Despite his promise to "promote the kind of reasoned discussion that has been conspicuously absent to date," Mr. Pattullo does not even address this issue, let alone give a convincing answer.

KENT GORDIS
Geneva, Switzerland

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In "Straight Talk About Gays," E.L. Pattullo cites England's immediate past chief rabbi, Sir Immanuel Jakobovits, to the effect that "All the authentic sources of Judaism condemn homosexual relations as a heinous offense." Paul and other equally authentic sources of Christianity are no less emphatic in condemning homosexuality. This is also true of the natural-law tradition, the tradition of unassisted reason, a tradition in large measure common to both Judaism and Christianity. . . .

Mr. Pattullo's article, taken as a whole, is a well-meaning but fruitless attempt to find a middle ground between disapproval and approval of homosexuality. One is reminded of Lincoln's warning against "groping for some middle ground between the right and the wrong, vain as the search for a man who should be neither a living man nor a dead man." It is not extremist or irrational to agree with the tradition of both reason and revelation that holds homosexuality to be unnatural. What is

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at stake here is not the standing of homosexuality alone, but of all morality, as something grounded in more than mere subjective preference. . . .

Morality comes to sight as the mutual obligations, first of all, of husband and wife, then of parents and children, brothers and sisters. From this it expands to include the extended family, the clan, tribe, city, country, and, at last, mankind. We find the moral law condensed in the injunction that we should do to others—that is to say, others who share our nature—what we would have them do to us. Mankind as a whole is recognized by its generations, like a river which is one and the same, while the ever-renewed cycles of birth and death flow on. But the generations are constituted—and can only be constituted—by the acts of generation arising from the conjunction of male and female. The distinction between a man and a woman is not only in itself according to nature, but is the very distinction by which nature itself is constituted. Lincoln once said that if slavery is not unjust, nothing is unjust. On the same premises, if sodomy is not unnatural, nothing is unnatural.

Mr. Pattullo observes "that there is a bit of the waverer in . . . many of us" and that "straights" often feel threatened "not because gays are so different, but because they are so similar." But most human beings at one time or another detect tendencies in themselves to cheating, stealing, homicide, adultery, and other wrongful actions. If we are well brought up, we condemn such actions in ourselves or others, not because of innate tendencies, but because we understand that they are wrong, and that we as human beings are responsible for what we do.

As individuals, our natures differ, within the bounds of our common nature. As Aristotle notes, some are born fearful, and others bold. But the fearful one can become a brave man and a hero; and the bold one turn out a poltroon. Character is not determined by innate tendencies. Moral education consists in habituating ourselves to the actions of the virtues and overcoming our tendencies to the actions of the vices. But there can be no moral education where there is no clear understanding of the ground in reason and nature for the distinction between virtue and vice. Tolerance does not require of us that we cease to call things by their right names.

HARRY V. JAFFA
Center for the Study of the
Natural Law
The Claremont Institute
Claremont, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Though I agree with E.L. Pattullo's conclusions, I think his article suffers from a major disease of neoconservatism: the absence of firm principles. . . . Very often conservative authors, Mr. Pattullo included, . . . implicitly accept the liberal ground rules and then try to argue a conservative cause lost from the beginning. Mr. Pattullo rejects "religious dicta" in relation to homosexuality, but then tries to make a case for some moderate discrimination against homosexuals as educators of young people, either as adoptive parents or leaders of Boy Scouts, because their influence on "the character and psyche of growing children" may affect their sexual orientation.

But what difference does it make? Nowhere in this article do we find an explanation of why it is better to grow up straight, and why we should, if possible, try to prevent children from becoming gay. Nowhere do we find the opinion that, in the heterosexual realm as well, not all behavior is acceptable, but that sex should be practiced within the framework of love, marriage, and family. . . .

If we try to formulate the original axioms for our moral judgment on homosexuality, two alternatives should be considered. One is that sex is given by God (my apologies to any enlightened secular person whose eye falls on this) for purposes of reproduction, and that homosexuality is an abnormality, an error, because it does not serve this goal. . . . The second, and opposite, view, explicitly expressed in the sexual revolution, transforms sex into just another kind of entertainment, something like going to movies or nightclubs. High-tech contraceptives have made it even easier to break completely not just from any connection with reproduction, but from family obligations and the whole complex set of moral and cultural limitations which have been imposed on sex throughout the history of Western and other civilizations.

Only if one accepts the first axiom, without fear of being accused of religious fundamentalism, can a convincing argument be made for limiting the rights of homosexuals. Only then is it obvious that being straight is better, because it is normal. Until we learn the real causes of homosexuality and can offer a cure to those gays and lesbians who want it, we should assume that homosexuality, albeit a defect, is a natural one, and we should treat homosexuals with tolerance and decency. This means no discrimination in hiring for most jobs and outright rejection of violence and insults against them. But gays should be considered inherently unfit to be parents and educators, just as people without good voices are unfit to sing in the Metropolitan Opera. . . .

DAVID SHUR
Berkeley Heights, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

E.L. Pattullo displays both wisdom and courage in writing "Straight Talk About Gays." . . . He is deeply and correctly concerned that the homosexual movement has gone beyond securing civil-rights protection against persecution and is now demanding that all societal distinctions between heterosexuals and homosexuals be completely abolished. . . .

As a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, and as a researcher in the field of sexual deviation, I continue to be troubled by the social and scientific consequences of the American Psychiatric Association's decision, in 1975, to remove homosexuality from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* for sociopolitical reasons. . . . The motive force for this decision was the wish to protect homosexuals against injustices and persecution, an aim which could have been achieved by a simple demand for equal rights. . . . Instead, the false step of removing homosexuality from the manual was substituted, which amounted to the approval of homosexuality and encouragement to aberrancy by those who should have known better—both in the scientific sense and in the sense of the social consequences of such removal.

The devastating clinical consequences of this decision have since followed. Those who wish to retain homosexuality as a valid diagnosis have been practically silenced by lectures, meetings, and publications both originating within our

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association and from other sources. . . .

In essence, this movement within the psychiatric establishment has accomplished what every other society, with rare exceptions, would have trembled to tamper with, a revision of a basic code and concept of life and biology: that men and women normally mate with the opposite sex and not with the same sex. . . .

This psychiatric nonsense and social recklessness bring with it many individual tragedies, as men and women who no longer care for their appropriate sexual roles create confusion in the very young for generations to come. Gender-identity disturbance is bound to increase and more true homosexual deviations result as parents distort the maleness or femaleness of their infants and children. . . .

Homosexuals who are in therapy have developed tremendous resistance, which retards their progress, while others are dissuaded from seeking appropriate help. Other medical specialists such as pediatricians and internists are baffled by psychiatry's folly. . . . Residents in psychiatry have very little interest in going into an area of psychiatric research where they will be attacked, belittled, and demeaned, and their knowledge of sexual development will cease to grow. Above all, however, it is the individual homosexual wishing to change who suffers the most.

Young men and women with relatively minor sexual fears are led with equanimity by some psychiatrists and nonmedical counselors into a self-despising pattern and life-style. Adolescents, nearly all of whom experience some degree of uncertainty as to sexual identity, are discouraged from assuming that one form of gender identity is preferable to another. Those persons who already have a homosexual problem are discouraged from finding their way out of self-destructive fantasy—discouraged from learning to accept themselves as male or female, discouraged from all those often painful but necessary courses that allow us to function as reasonable and participating individuals in a cooperating society.

After all, homosexuality cannot make a society or keep one going for very long. It operates against the cohesive elements of society. It drives the sexes in opposite directions, and no society can long endure when either the child is neglected or when the sexes war with each other. Those who reinforce the disintegrating elements in our society will get no thanks from future generations. . . .

CHARLES W. SOCARIDES, M.D.
Clinical Professor of Psychiatry
Albert Einstein College of Medicine
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

"Straight Talk About Gays" offers some good reasons for continued caution about homosexual demands. There are still other reasons, most of them concerned with the need to inhibit behavior which is risky for both gays and straights. An example which comes quickly to mind is promiscuity, a community health hazard as well as a lifestyle choice. . . .

A more significant example is the demand increasingly being heard from politicized female homosexuals for "sexual and reproductive freedom." This translates into the increasingly tolerated practice of deliberate illegitimacy. . . .

During the 80's so many gay women acquired children through artificial insemination—and also by *ad hoc* heterosexual intercourse and adoption—that insiders referred to the trend as the "lesbian baby boom." The actual numbers remain speculative, but a March 1990 *Newsweek* article estimated that one-third of all lesbians were mothers and that seven million children had gay parents. . . .

But the numbers . . . are less significant than their supportive ideology, which must attack what one advocate called the "hegemonic paradigm," the principle of legitimacy itself, which requires for each child a father and a mother bound in marriage. Some ideologues thus see themselves as vanguard revolutionaries against the two-parent heterosexual norm, which is as old as memory and as wide as human society itself. One counselor of prospective lesbian mothers wrote: "We are challenging the traditional heterosexual nuclear family. We are saying we can do it differently and make it work. . . ."

Another emphasized that success required devaluing the father's role. "We must make the courts realize," she wrote, "that concern over the absence of a male model is a bogus issue." . . .

Such concepts have now worked their way, as the Murphy Brown episode revealed, into liberal ideology, a process which has nudged public policy in general toward a diminished fatherhood, making the male the "disposable" parent. Thus, tolerance of just one newly-asserted "gay right" compromises our effort to restore stability to a father/mother family whose health affects all of us, gay or straight.

FRANK S. ZEPEZAUER
Sunnyvale, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

The article by E.L. Pattullo wisely points up the question of socially acceptable parameters of the gay-rights movement. Begun in 1969 with a vengeance at the Stonewall bar in New York City, when a group of gays fought back for the first time in the course of a police raid, the movement has employed political and judicial tactics to get rid of discriminatory practices on the basis of sexual orientation in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations. In recent years it has added to its agenda such items as employee fringe benefits to same-sex couples, the legal sanction of gay marriages, etc.

In my view, Stonewall took a pernicious turn when it hinged its crusade on the issue of sexual orientation instead of on single (marital) status. If it had focused on the latter, single straights as well as almost all gays—who are virtually all single—would be covered by non-discriminatory legislation. Marriage is the culmination of heterosexual orientation, and the single state, a minority group, is the culmination of a sexual orientation—straight, gay, bi-, or none-of-the-above—the amorphous nature of which should be protected from discrimination.

What Stonewall did was to open up a Pandora's box of sexuality, and if it has liberated anything, it has been the Freudian id instead of the Freudian superego.

ROBERT LYON
Temple University
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Masters and Johnson, who researched human sexuality for a quarter of a century, concluded from their research that *no one is born homosexual*; it is not genetic, but learned through experience.

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Their conclusion appears to be based on their research into homosexual dysfunction. Another result of this research: about two-thirds of those who had a reason and a desire to change their sexual orientation were successful.

I find their conclusion most credible because they do not take a stand on homosexual behavior. Unfortunately, because this is not a politically-correct opinion, the media have been conspicuously silent about it; but those who attempt to find evidence that homosexuals are born get a great deal of media attention.

Many who believe they are homosexual, especially the young, think themselves to be some sort of freak. . . . They need to know that they are normal human beings who were exposed to this sexual orientation and that there is at least a possibility of change. . . .

I agree with E.L. Pattullo that attitudes and actions need to be changed, but at the same time society must ensure that all children clearly understand the desirability of growing up to be heterosexual adults.

EILEEN O'BRIEN
Elkhorn, Wisconsin

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

E.L. Pattullo suggests that only if some measure of choice is involved in becoming gay could there be any reason to find it in any degree objectionable, so that society might not be entirely indifferent to sexual orientation. This seems to be a mistake, since one can certainly find something objectionable about conditions that could not be subject to choice. That some people are born deaf or retarded does not mean that there is nothing wrong with being deaf or retarded. Of course, there could be nothing blameworthy about such conditions, but that is a different matter. . . .

There is an interesting issue not touched upon by Mr. Pattullo related to the military's policy of excluding gays from its ranks, which President Clinton is now in the process of reversing. So long as sexual segregation is considered a sound policy for the military (or any other institution involving the grouping of members of a given sex in circumstances that make privacy impossible), it is arguable that giving gays access to others of their sex defeats the purpose of sexual segregation. If, for example, men should not shower with women, presumably so that men and women should not gain visual access to one another without consent, then gays should not have visual access either to other gays or straights so that this element of consent is not violated.

This does not imply anything unusual about the sexual appetites of gays. All it means is that having gays in intimate visual contact with those in whom they may have a sexual interest is an imposition on those who are unaware of what they are being exposed to. Indeed, in the case of gays having access to other gays or straights, the situation is more complicated than straights of one sex having access to straights of another. In the former case there is no evident presumption of sexual interest, so people would more likely have their guard down about having to share their privacy with those who may have a sexual interest in them.

TIBOR R. MACHAN
Visiting Professor of Philosophy
United States Military Academy
West Point, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . For our society to be healthy, it is necessary that we use all reasonable means to suppress homosexuality. Late in the 1960's, this society essentially surrendered in the fight against homosexuality and we are now reaping the fruit of this policy change.

Perhaps the most disastrous result of the toleration of homosexuality is AIDS. This year around 51,000 people in this country will die of AIDS. Ninety-five percent of these victims will be either homosexual and/or drug users. The rest will be those who caught the disease from homosexuals and/or drug users, either through contaminated blood products, contaminated transfusions, intercourse with infected individuals, or infection *in utero*.

The disaster of AIDS was totally preventable. Had the homosexual life-style not been tolerated, there would be no epidemic. In the 1950's the laws against homosexuality were, to a large extent, enforced. By the 1970's, this was no longer the case, and in the 1990's tens of thousands are dying. . . .

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against homosexuals . . . we must discriminate against heterosexuals. Health insurance is a perfect example of this problem. As a sexually inactive heterosexual female, my odds of catching AIDS are lower than the odds of my being hit by lightning. But if I purchase health insurance I am compelled to pay the astronomical health bills associated with the treatment of AIDS. I would be willing to purchase health insurance which specifically excluded payment for AIDS, but that is prohibited by anti-discrimination laws. . . .

The problem with homosexuality is not whether it is volitional. Those persons who are homosexual have not chosen to be this way. The problem with homosexuality, at least on the male side, is that it is more than just a desire for sex with other men. It is a fundamental personality disorder which manifests itself in a compulsive sexuality that leads to no good ends. . . .

A fourteen-year-old boy who is not sexually experienced may be lured into the homosexual lifestyle if he encounters a predatory adult homosexual. The same boy at age nineteen may be immune to the allure of homosexuality. In the age of AIDS this problem is not academic. We must continue to fight homosexuality to protect that fourteen-year-old boy. If we can delay his exposure to homosexuality for five years we may be able to save his life.

One final point: although homosexuality is a severe personality disorder, . . . homosexuals are not evil persons and must be treated with respect. Physical assaults on homosexuals and the pathological hatred of homosexuals known as homophobia are themselves evil and should not be tolerated. We must love the sinner, but hate the sin.

SUSAN JORDAN
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I very much enjoyed E.L. Pattullo's article. It provided a note of moderation in an avalanche of extreme talk about a most sensitive subject. . . .

As a retired Coast Guard captain, with a total of 35 years in the military, 29 of them as a commissioned officer, I have made a number of observations over the years on the subject of gays in the military.

In general, most of the homosexual offenses I became aware of were committed by outwardly heterosexual men, usually married, some with children, even one grandfather. Separate some men from their families and away from women for a period of time and they act poorly.

President Clinton most assuredly is correct when he states that the issue is conduct, and I believe that eliminating the ban on homosexuals in the military should be done slowly and carefully and be accompanied by service indoctrination. To be blunt about it, I fear outbreaks of violence in the service as a result of the new policy. . . .

MAXWELL S. CHARLESTON
Olney, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . I agree with many of the conclusions reached by E.L. Pattullo, but with an administration determined to protect and enforce politically-correct views, the subject of gays is no longer academic.

Two areas of immediate interest are gays in the rabbinate and gays in the military. The author quotes Sir Immanuel Jakobovits, when he was chief rabbi of England, as condemning homosexual relations, the traditional view of Judaism. . . . Reform Judaism, however, the most liberal of the Jewish groups, approves gay rabbis, part of the rationale being that whether we accept gay rabbis or not we have them anyway. A practical, not a religious reason. . . .

As for gays in the military, . . . as we have recently seen, all top military officials have stated that homosexuality is incompatible with military service and that the presence of homosexuals impedes good order and morale. General Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has said that the presence of homosexuals would interfere with the right to privacy of heterosexual troops, though many countries, including Australia and Canada, do permit gays to serve. Here the issue would appear to be not one of human rights, but the efficiency of the military. . . .

In any case, the time for feinting is past; we must face the issue of gays and their status in our institutions directly. Otherwise, like so many other social issues, it will be determined by politicians anxious to fulfill campaign promises or wishing to pander to voting blocs or liberal do-gooders. I am pleased that the issue of gays is now openly discussed and citizens with opinions openly express their views and are concerned with policy results.

ROBERT J. ROSENTHAL
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

It seems incredible that we—*homo sapiens*—have deviated so far in our thinking and in our natural functioning that we should even be considering homosexuality as "just another life-style" instead of the aberration it really is.

As far as we know at this moment in time, the earth came into existence four-and-one-half billion years ago. One billion years later, the earth was covered with unicellular creatures. Around two billion years after that, multicellular creatures had developed, and some time during the ensuing millennia, sexual differentiation occurred. This fact of nature is irrefragable and irrevocable. The real question is: why do we seem to be in a continual state of denial about our natural functioning instead of facing up to the truth about it? If we could only face this truth, everything else would fall into place and homosexuals might get the help they really need instead of the false acceptance that is so damaging to them and to society in general.

PATRICIA MEYEROWITZ
Easton, Pennsylvania

E.L. PATTULLO writes:

One of the issues raised, implicitly or explicitly, by several of my critics is whether or not it is legitimate to speculate about a matter of public policy when there is a paucity of fact. A predictable result of doing so, of course, is that one assertion is simply countered by another. In a famous exchange, James Thurber dubbed this the myass school of argument. A says to B, "Dizzy Dean is the greatest pitcher of all time," prompting B to respond, "Dizzy Dean is the greatest pitcher of all time, myass!"

Though it fails to improve the argument, there is no help for this problem. More often than not, public policy must proceed in the absence of sure knowledge and some of the controversy it arouses must get bogged down in the Thurber school. Any who doubt this might consider the question of what to do about the economy

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at any given time. For every expert opinion there exist several others, equally expert, urging a quite different course of action.

Aware of the absence of knowledge concerning the genesis of homosexual attraction, I was careful to qualify most of my assertions about fact as probabilities, and to point them out for readers. Several of my critics are less careful and seem to assert sure knowledge about things for which there is, as yet, little scientific evidence. Bruce Bawer, for instance, says, "sexual orientation is certainly fixed by early childhood." James B. Heft, John V.N. Philip, Samuel Schaal, and others make similar assertions with equal confidence. Yet though many gays attest that they never experienced doubt as to their sexual preference, many others, gay and straight, report different memories. I can only repeat that no reputable student of the subject pretends to know precisely how or when sexual orientation is fixed.

All of us who venture opinions on this difficult subject need to be aware of the tendency to overinterpret our own experience. Our sexuality is ever present and so central to our being that it is hard to resist the temptation to project onto others that which we have felt and know to be of great importance in our own lives.

Kent Gordis, David Shur, and Harry V. Jaffa take me to task for failing to make a judgment on the morality of homosexuality one way or the other. On the other side, Ray Bono, Bruce Bawer, Gregory J. King, and Rabbi Elias J. Lieberman argue that there is no objective moral reason for preferring straight to gay. I do not deny the existence of the moral dimension, and recognize the power it brings to any argument. But that power is dependent upon acceptance of the moral system invoked, and there are many competing ones. It is my purpose to try to persuade readers not that a wholly value-free (objective) case can be made, but that *given straights' bias in favor of heterosexuality* there is a purely pragmatic justification both for tolerance of homosexuals and for continuing to discriminate against them in certain areas. Though that bias can be confirmed or rebutted only within the framework of a moral code, it is a datum that forms a legitimate base for a reasoned argument.

Another explicit theme in several of the letters is a denial of the idea that there can be a middle ground between total acceptance and total rejection of those who live the gay life. Their authors clearly think me insincere in suggesting the possibility. This is odd when, in recent years, we have seen so many people abandon the fear and dislike with which they once viewed homosexuality, moving to occupy that middle ground. In wide areas of the United States it is apparent that a majority now sees no reason to dislike or scorn gays and, indeed, actively opposes those who would bait or bully them. The very rash of anti-discrimination laws and rules—which I deplore—demonstrates a rising tolerance—which I applaud. Consider, too, the attitudes prevailing in our leading colleges and universities. And in most large cities, gay men and women need no longer fear the ostracism that once would have followed upon their orientation becoming known. In other places, we all know, there is still much work to be done.

Yet it remains true that among those newly tolerant are many who, by moral conviction—religious or other—still regard homosexual acts as wrong. Many others remain firm in the belief that an inability to form a traditional family is a grave misfortune. And almost all parents hope their children—whom they will continue to love in any event—will grow up straight.

The changes already accomplished, thanks to the efforts of gay activists, amply demonstrate that gays can find a secure place in society without forcing that same society to pretend that it places no greater value on the straight life than on the gay one.

Yet having made long strides toward persuading straight society to be tolerant of differing sexual orientations, gay political leaders remain discontented. They now wish to use the law to force public and private institutions to treat gays *exactly* as they treat straights. The model is the anti-discrimination statutes that seek equal treatment regardless of gender, race, or religion. That effort offends not only those who condemn homosexual acts as immoral, but also those who think the straight life vastly preferable and believe it likely (as do I) that socialization plays a role in determining sexual orientation.

If the last belief is correct, there is good reason to insist that gays rest content when society as a whole becomes genuinely tolerant of those of their sexual orientation. To require that the majority act as if it believes the two life-styles to be equally desirable, by forbidding any kind of discrimination whatsoever between the two, is to demand too much. Race, gender, religion, and—now—physical handicap are each a different story.

Paul A. Siskind, Bert Thompson, and Mark Adam Schnurman invoke an analogy substituting Christians and Jews for straights and gays. Why, they suggest, should a predominantly Christian society not use my reasoning to justify differential treatment of Jews? But analogies mislead as often as not. Religious belief is not the same kind of phenomenon as sexual orientation, and to forbid discrimination in one area does not imply that it must be forbidden every place.

Finally, it is clear that many of my critics are concerned exclusively with the welfare of those who define themselves as gay, dismissing those I have chosen to call waverers as self-deceiving. Only Charles W. Socarides, clinical professor of psychiatry at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and a long-time student of homosexuality, speaks compassionately of those who reject their gay inclinations, and Eileen O'Brien and Patricia Meyerowitz touch on the same point. No one else expresses much sympathy (let alone empathy) for persons who could be straight but may become predominantly gay in an environment that refuses to distinguish between the two. Several, of course, deny this possibility and several others clearly think one orientation is as good as the other. But for those of us who still believe the straight life is preferable, the spectacle of a child growing up gay when he might have been straight is little short of tragic.

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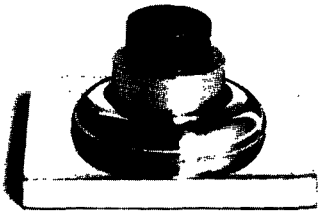

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Homosexuality and the Schools

Midge Decter

On November 12, 1992, Mary A. Cummins, president of the community board of School District 24 in Queens, New York, addressed a letter to Dr. Joseph Fernandez, the city's schools chancellor. In this letter, she informed Dr. Fernandez that the elementary schools in District 24 would not be making use of the teaching guide for the first grade that had been distributed by the central Board of Education. If, she added, he persisted in applying pressure on them to do so—specifically, threatening the community board with dissolution if it did not comply—District 24 would take him to court.

There are 32 community school boards in New York City. These boards are elected by the people in their respective districts and are invested with considerable control over the money budgeted for their local schools, as well as with the power to hire and fire district superintendents and school principals. This arrangement was devised, with a boost from the Ford Foundation, in the late 60's, during the administration of Mayor John V. Lindsay, and was basically intended to give the city's blacks a greater say in the running of the schools. What is sauce for the goose, of course, often unintendedly becomes sauce for the gander, and so greater power was also in some places to fall into the laps of non-black groups as well.

Community control, as this new policy was called, almost immediately ran into certain difficulties, among them a shockingly high incidence of corruption and nepotism—and the cynicism about performance that usually attends such phenomena—in certain ghetto school districts. Thus when Joseph Fernandez, soon after taking on the job of chancellor in 1990, proceeded to assert his authority over a community board which had appointed a thoroughly unacceptable superintendent, he was applauded by ordinary citizens throughout the city.

Fernandez's attempt to assert his authority over the community board of District 24, however, involved a very different circumstance. The teaching guide at issue here was a 443-page book entitled *Children of the Rainbow—First Grade.* As its name suggests, the guide was a product of the new movement in education called "multiculturalism." It had been ordered up in 1989, not by Fernandez himself but by his predecessor, who in the course of an extremely brief tenure had decreed that teaching materials be revised to show a greater sensitivity to the city's famous diversity. By 1991, with the school system now under new management, the resulting *Rainbow* guide had been printed and distributed for introduction into the classroom.

What would subsequently lead District 24 to take Fernandez all the way to the brink (and vice versa) was, technically speaking, only a small number of pages out of the 443 (and a few lines more on a recommended reading list). On page 372, for instance, under the heading "Fostering Positive Attitudes Toward Sexuality," the first-grade teacher is urged to be aware of the "changing concept of family in today's society." In order to be able to work effectively with every child, the guide continues, it is important to know that

> children of lesbian/gay parents may have limited experience with male/female parental situations; if there is no representation of their lives in the classroom, they may suddenly be made to feel different.

Similarly, "children growing up in heterosexually headed families may be experiencing contact with lesbians/gays for the first time."

The guide then goes on to point out that, "according to statistics," at least 10 percent of each class will grow up to be homosexual. Further,

> because of pervasive homophobia (the irrational fear of homosexuals) in society, lesbian/gay teens are more likely to drop out of school, commit suicide, abuse drugs/alcohol, or get pregnant [*sic*] than the rest of their peers. Lesbian/gay students (or even those just perceived as gay) are frequently assaulted, verbally and physically, by other students and parents. It is also common for them to be thrown out of their homes once their parents find out the child is gay.

Midge Decter is the author of, among other books, *Liberal Parents, Radical Children.* A Distinguished Fellow of the Institute on Religion and Public Life, she has often written on the social and political problems surrounding the schools, most recently in "E Pluribus Nihil: Multiculturalism and Black Children" (Commentary, September 1991).

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Though none of this would seem to have much to do with first-graders, the guide explains that the teachers of these six-year-olds are in a position to give them "a healthy sense of identity." Teachers are accordingly instructed to

> include references to lesbian/gay people in all curricular areas and [to] avoid exclusionary practices by presuming a person's sexual orientation, reinforcing stereotypes, or speaking of lesbians/gays as "they" or "other."

Moreover, says the guide, the teachers have a special responsibility here, for if they themselves do not bring up lesbian/gay issues, these issues are not likely to come up at all. Hence in order for first-graders "to view lesbians/gays as real people to be respected and appreciated," they need "actual experiences via creative play, books, visitors, etc."

While the possible forms of "creative play"—along with any identifying characteristics of the "visitors"—are not specified, certain books included in the list of teaching aids and the bibliography make the intention more than clear: in addition to a gay/lesbian coloring book for preschoolers, there are *Daddy's Roommate*, *Heather Has Two Mommies*, and *Gloria Goes to Gay Pride*.* It is these books that were ultimately to serve as the symbolic eye of the ensuing storm in District 24.

Daddy's Roommate and *Heather Has Two Mommies* are works clearly intended for very young children, with large illustrations and brief text: "Daddy and his roommate Frank live together/ Work together/ Eat together/ Sleep together/ Shave together/ And sometimes even fight together," etc. The point is that Frank is just as nice to the book's small narrator as Daddy is, and "Daddy and his roommate are very happy together/ and I'm happy, too." But in the event, it would actually be *Heather* that would draw the most fire because of its graphic treatment of Heather's conception, achieved by means of artificial insemination.

WITHOUT bothering to spend time on any of the other offenses against first-graders lurking in the pages of *Children of the Rainbow*, Mary Cummins and her board rested their defiance of Fernandez on just these passages and reading recommendations. Their objections, outlined in the November 12 letter to him, were threefold. The first was that the guide informs teachers that homosexuality is commonplace, using the old Kinsey figure of 10 percent. This, they said, is a lie: responsible researchers set the figure at 3.3 percent, and even that includes all men who have *ever* engaged in adult homosexual activity, even if only occasionally. The second objection was that the guide intentionally promotes the impression that, in Mary Cummins's words, "sodomy isn't particularly dangerous"—this, in the teeth of the "grim medical reality" of AIDS. And third, the guide's ultimate message is that homosexual couples are families like all others and that children must be taught to acknowledge the positive aspects of such households.

In short, what Mary Cummins and her colleagues saw here was outright homosexual propaganda, and no schools chancellor, no matter what his officially-sanctioned authority, was going to force them to sit still for its use in teaching their district's children—most especially its littlest ones.

The brouhaha that surrounded and followed the Cummins-Fernandez confrontation included meetings and demonstrations of angry parents; battling among the members of the central Board of Education that ended with a reversal of Fernandez's suspension of the District 24 board; a change of position by the leader of the teachers' union, Sandra Feldman, who had originally been on Fernandez's side; the display of a considerable dolefulness on the part of a mayor heavily in political debt to the city's homosexuals; and ultimately the decision by the Board of Education not to renew Fernandez's contract when it expires in June.

But in the course of all this confusion, certain interesting facts emerged. While at first only District 24 registered an explicit objection, it turned out that *Children of the Rainbow—First Grade* was actually in very little use *anywhere* in the city. Many first-grade teachers, on receiving so hefty a new assignment, simply put the book up on the shelf; they had, as one of them explained, more than enough to do as it was. Then an enterprising team of reporters from *Newsday* disclosed that the controversial section of the guide had been written by a member of the Gay and Lesbian Teachers' Association who herself claimed to agree that *Heather* was not "age-appropriate" and who also claimed not to know how the book had found its way onto the list. So, too, the director of the Office of Multicultural Education—the person ultimately responsible for the curriculum—claimed that the book was not really being recommended for the children but rather as a "useful reference" for the teachers. Finally, the most interesting revelation of all was that Joseph Fernandez, adamant as he was being with District 24, had not himself read through the guide before it was published.

Perhaps it was Fernandez's discovery that once the word got out Mary Cummins was able to rally

* "Gay Pride," for those who do not know, refers to the parade of various homosexual groups that takes place annually in certain American cities on the anniversary of a particularly brutal police raid on a gay bar in Greenwich Village, the event that gave rise to the homosexual-rights movement. In this parade, contingents of homosexual Catholics, Protestants, Jews, schoolteachers, policemen, along with organizations like Queer Nation, ACT-UP, Gay Men's Health Crisis, North American Man-Boy Love Association, and others, march under their respective banners.

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the support of an unreckoned-on number of parents from all around the city, or perhaps it was the shock of being abandoned by even his strongest allies on the central Board of Education. Whatever the reason, by mid-December the chancellor had moved to a fall-back position: he was comfortable, he now announced, with the idea of delaying lessons in tolerance toward homosexuals until the fifth or sixth grade:

> What I am requiring is that diverse family structures be recognized and that each is acknowledged as a loving, caring household. Nothing more. Nothing less.

THERE was, however, one most curious aspect to this story, which none of the news accounts came anywhere near to considering—why Fernandez got himself into this imbroglio in the first place. After all, virtually the entire school system that had been placed in his keeping, once upon a time one of the glories of American public education, was in a state of social and pedagogical crisis. Quite apart from the difficulty the system was having in trying to teach its pupils how to read, write, and compute, not to mention a little history and geography, there were schools in the city in which the authorities literally could not protect children from getting shot. There were many more where knives and razors, somehow escaping the metal detectors installed behind school doors, were at least as common as book bags. Why then should Fernandez have staked his power and his considerable reputation as a manager on a battle against a group of outraged and mobilized parents for the sake of providing the city's six-year-olds with someone's idea of a preemptive cure for homophobia?

To some extent, no doubt, it was a question of his authority and of his need to assert it, a need that had only a short time before been sympathetically recognized. To some extent, too, he must have been driven by municipal politics. District 24 covers an area of Queens whose population is largely Catholic. Possibly Fernandez feared that this fact alone would be enough to set off a certain amount of inconvenient turbulence among radical homosexual groups like ACT-UP, whose assertions of "gay pride" had frequently taken the form of demonstrations against the Church, up to and including desecrations of the mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral—the Church, and most particularly John Cardinal O'Connor of New York, having earned their undying hatred for refusing to bless homosexual behavior, as so many other religious denominations have by now agreed to do. Fernandez may well have felt that, where the schools were concerned, prudence would dictate avoiding any additional such ugliness.

But the largest part of Fernandez's conduct surely has to be seen as a tribute not so much to the potential of noisy disruptions by homosexual radicals as to the more conventional political power of New York's homosexual community in general. It was almost certainly this power, for example, that initially drove the unsupervised inclusion of unedited gay/lesbian material in the teaching guide. It was almost certainly this power that led the head of the teachers' union to defend the curriculum—until, that is, the countervailing power of parental outcry led her to modify her position, at least to the point of resorting to that most ubiquitous of current evasions of moral judgment in child psychology and pedagogy—the term "inappropriate."

And it was clearly this power, far more than any concern over Fernandez's authority, that occasioned the outspoken resistance of Mary Cummins & Co. The reason *Children of the Rainbow* had not been put up on a shelf and ignored in District 24, as it had been in other districts, was that this particular local rebellion was—and was consciously intended to be—part of a wider struggle against homosexual influence in the city's schools.

AT THE center of that wider struggle was a draft curriculum for teaching about AIDS from kindergarten through grade 6, which the Board of Education issued at virtually the same time as it published the *Rainbow* guide. This draft was designed as a supplement to a sex-education curriculum already long in use, rather soothingly entitled *Family Living Including Sex Education*. Like *Rainbow*, the AIDS curriculum was produced under the supervision of Nilda Soto Ruiz, chief executive for instruction, and was subsequently reviewed by the 56 members of a body called the Citywide Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. This council of reviewers included educators, doctors, social workers, minority activists, representatives of civil-rights organizations, two Protestant ministers, two rabbis, one priest, and six people representing among them three homosexual activist groups (ACT-UP, the Hetrick-Martin Institute, and Gay Men's Health Crisis). Aside from the reviewers, Andrew Humm, who is associated both with the Gay Cable Network (a station on which pornographic homosexual movies are regularly shown) and the Hetrick-Martin Institute, was given special thanks for his help in drawing up the curriculum.

The introduction to the new curriculum spells out five reasons for offering special instruction about AIDS to children in grades K (that is, kindergarten) through 6. First, children need to know that abstinence from sexual activity is the only sure protection against the sexual transmission of HIV. Second, they need to know that HIV is not contagious but rather transmissible and they need to learn how to protect themselves—a lesson that will not only keep them healthy but will help them to feel comfortable around people with AIDS. Third, they need to know that though

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there is as yet no cure, scientists are working to find one, and meanwhile there are treatments—this last being especially important for children who are acquainted with someone, possibly even a family member, with HIV/AIDS. Fourth, "Children need to know that AIDS is no one's fault, and that all people with AIDS should be treated with compassion." Especially, the draft continues,

> for children who know someone who contracted the disease through contaminated needles or sexual contact with an infected partner it is important to make it clear that it is drug use and unprotected sex that should be avoided, not drug users or people who are sexually active.

And fifth, while children need to know that unprotected sex and "other risky behaviors" can result in AIDS, as well as in unwanted pregnancies, "responsible and caring sex can produce feelings of intimacy and joy." Therefore, teaching about the dangers of AIDS "should not create fears about sexuality and sexual intimacy."

The document moves on to acknowledge that subjects like drug use by injection or sex and condoms may seem too advanced to be introduced in elementary school, and that parents, remembering the protectedness of their own childhood years, may yearn to afford their children the same sheltered life. However, "we cannot assure children that HIV is 'hard to get' unless we tell them how HIV is transmitted." Just as fire drills, in order to protect children, remind them of the dangers of fire, AIDS education alerts them to another contemporary hazard. And "like fire, the virus does not care about a person's age, race, or sexual orientation. It simply spreads where it can."

Two rather complicated tasks are assigned here. One is to make young children understand that AIDS is no one's fault while at the same time teaching them to avoid "risky behaviors"; the other is to show the children "how the tragedy of AIDS affects our society" while at the same time conveying "reassurance, compassion, hope, and affirmation." To help in performing these tasks, the curriculum provides a set of most interesting "guidelines."

To begin with, teachers are not to assume that all students are heterosexual; indeed, HIV/AIDS education should contribute to reducing "the problems of racism, homophobia, and bigotry associated with [the] disease." Abstinence from both sex and drugs should be emphasized, and condom demonstrations may be put off until the 7th grade (i.e., age twelve), but it should be early understood that

> proper and consistent use of condoms can be very effective in reducing one's risk of contracting HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases and in protecting against unwanted pregnancy.

Teachers are also advised of various classroom resources available to assist them, such as audiovisuals and guest speakers. With respect to the audiovisuals, teachers should be careful to preview any films for appropriateness before presenting them, and they should also avoid large auditorium presentations since these "do not lend themselves to effective discussion and processing of the sensitive issues covered. . . ."

As for guest speakers, bringing Persons With AIDS (PWAs, as the curriculum calls them) into the classroom can be an "effective teaching strategy." Teachers should not at any time, however, refer to these people as victims: "Victims are seen as powerless and it is important to respect the struggle for life in which PWAs are involved."

Beyond this it is, of course, most important to secure the involvement and cooperation of parents. If a parent or legal guardian files a written request with the principal asking that his child be exempted from AIDS instruction, that parent "must give an assurance that similar instruction will be provided at home." (There follow several pages instructing the teachers themselves in some of the fine points of the disease, its cause, its manifestations, its incidence, how it is transmitted, etc., which, it is suggested, could also be offered as assistance to parents.)

The HIV/AIDS curriculum itself provides for five lessons at each grade level. Kindergartners (age five) are given four simple lessons in what it means to be healthy or sick, what germs are, and who helps to make us well when we are sick, and then one final lesson on AIDS, in which these five-year-olds are to learn three things: the difference between transmissible and non-transmissible diseases, the terms HIV and AIDS, and that AIDS is hard to get.

In the first grade (age six), the lessons cover much the same territory, on a somewhat higher level of complexity, with an introduction to the idea of the immune system. Here the children are supposed to learn that AIDS is only transmissible when infected blood or other bodily fluids get into one's own blood.

In grade 2 (age seven), along with a repetition of the above material, the children are now to take up the issue of feelings about sickness and sick people. In grade 3 (age eight), they are supposed to start thinking seriously about healthy and unhealthy choices and to learn how to get help for their troubles. At this level they also begin to engage in classroom psychodrama, acting out such HIV/AIDS-specific situations as: "Billy's mother has AIDS. Some children call Billy names and insult his mother. How can other children help Billy?"

Finally, in grades 4 to 6 (ages nine to eleven), the lessons become medically quite sophisticated about matters like tracing chains of infection, the production of antibodies, and the behavior of the

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HIV virus. And—again with ascending degrees of concreteness for each succeeding grade—the lessons now take up the questions both of how AIDS is transmitted from individual to individual and how the disease in general has affected our society. The discussion of the latter issue consists mainly of the observation that the mislabeling of AIDS as a gay disease has resulted in increased bias against homosexuals.

In the three highest grades, it is the lesson plans for grade 5—that is to say, for ten-year-olds—that are of the greatest interest. For it is here, after the children have spent the estimated 30 minutes of lesson 1 reviewing antigens, antibodies, and vaccines, that they are provided, in lesson 2, with the first full, direct instruction about the sexual transmission of HIV. "If the students do not raise [the subject]," the teacher is advised, "you need to do so," since "many students may be unfamiliar with specific methods of sexual intercourse" (i.e., anal and oral, as well as vaginal).

Thus, in addition to discussing such means of transmission as blood transfusions with infected blood, childbirth from an infected mother, and needle-sharing (to which, in a curious spirit of outreach, have been appended ear-piercing, blood-brother ceremonies, and tattooing), the teacher is now to get down to the case of transmission by exposure to HIV-infected blood, semen, or vaginal fluids.

If for some reason the teacher should feel it difficult to teach this lesson, the curriculum suggests that an "HIV/AIDS educator" be brought into the classroom. But whoever teaches it, what the children are to understand at lesson's end is that a primary means of exposure to HIV is "sexual intercourse (oral, vaginal, or anal) with an infected person" that is either unprotected, i.e., "without the use of any barrier, such as condom and contraceptive foam," or that is inadequately protected, i.e., "during which a barrier method, such as condom and/or contraceptive foam or cream, was used but did not work." HIV can be transmitted during all forms of intercourse, the curriculum points out, but of these, anal intercourse is the most risky.

By the 6th grade (age eleven) the children are supposed to be ready for some direct application to themselves of what they have learned about drugs and sex. Hence the lesson plans turn to discussions of peer pressure, based on activities like supplying dialogue for story outlines involving one character's resisting the seductions of another. (One such dialogue is between two characters named Michael and Bill, who have, the children are told, "gone out together for a year." Bill smokes crack, and Michael, who "cares for" him, is worried.)

And finally, there are two lessons—by grade 6 they have reached a fairly high level of sophistication—devoted to the theme that has run like an underground stream through the whole curriculum: namely, that while people must do everything to avoid getting AIDS, no one already suffering from it is to be held responsible. If any blame is to be assigned, it is to the deficiencies both of our health-care system and of our society's capacity for compassion.

At the very end of this course of study the children will "brainstorm" about ways to give support to PWAs which, if their seven years of instruction have been successful, will include ideas like sending letters to legislators urging that new AIDS medicines be made available, along with treatment centers for drug users; helping prostitutes to find a safer way of life or at least to demand the use of condoms every time; volunteering to "hold and care for," or become foster parents of, babies with HIV/AIDS; publicizing the disease by such means as putting up posters, writing books and articles, or making films; donating food and clothing, or being a companion, to a person with AIDS; or helping such a person to find housing, or write a will.

It is important to bear in mind that this draft curriculum, as presented in June 1992, was itself a compromise document, an earlier draft having been deemed unacceptable by four members of the special advisory council. Their objection, contained in a minority report, was basically that the curriculum was "value-free"—that it failed to promote abstinence to a self-destructive New York City youth for whom this was an essential message, and in fact promoted the very behavior it claimed to be warning against. This contradiction, the minority concluded, resulted from the disproportionate number of homosexual advocates and organizations that had provided leadership in the development of the curricular material.

These were, it may be imagined, fighting words, though the fighting in this case was for a time to remain within the educational bureaucracy: not yet between the authorities and the parents but between, on the one side, four members of the seven-member Board of Education who shared the objections of the minority report, and on the other side their three colleagues, joined by a variety of politicians, among them Mayor David Dinkins, who endorsed the early draft.

This group of four, which was to be treated, and to behave, like a rump rather than a majority, was headed by Dr. Irene Impellizeri, the Board's vice chairman. They had demanded from the beginning that the curriculum emphasize sexual abstinence as the only absolutely effective means of preventing AIDS and other venereal diseases, and also as the only absolutely effective means of preventing unwanted pregnancy. And in this, as we have just seen from the June 1992 draft, they did in the literal sense succeed. The majority also

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demanded that any guest "AIDS educators" who might be invited into the classroom sign an oath to the effect that they, too, would emphasize abstinence—though here the Impellizeri group was to be thwarted by the city's acting commissioner of health, whose jurisdiction in the matter of outside experts crossed with the Board's.

As is often the case with people attempting to negotiate what is in fact non-negotiable, the success of the Impellizeri group in imposing an emphasis on abstinence bears an uncanny resemblance to defeat. Indeed, what has mainly been achieved by it is a rather dizzying degree of incoherence. For wherever the term abstinence appears, it is immediately contradicted within and by the surrounding context, which invariably stresses and blesses the joys of sex, straight and gay alike.

Meanwhile, there has been a concomitant struggle over the distribution of condoms in the high schools—a practice which seems, along with multiculturalism, to have become the last word in metropolitan educational fashion. Condom distribution, too, has been advertised as an AIDS preventive, based on the claim that there has been a significantly growing incidence of the disease among heterosexually active teenagers.

Like so much else connected with AIDS education, this claim is false. Teenagers make up less than 1 percent of all AIDS cases in the U.S., and hardly any of these are the result of normal heterosexual intercourse. Moreover, even that tiny proportion is declining.* (No less false is the impression conveyed throughout the AIDS curriculum that heterosexuals are as much at risk as homosexuals. Indeed, whatever may be the actual state of affairs in third-world countries, about whose sexual mores we know little, the truth is that in the U.S. only a minuscule number of people have contracted AIDS through normal heterosexual intercourse.)

In any event, the condom program, too, has been passionately debated, though as much for the recommended course of classroom instruction in how to use the condoms—one lesson of which involves teaching girls how to unroll the sheath over two raised fingers meant to represent an erect penis—as for their actual distribution.

What has complicated this particular debate is the hope that increasing the use of condoms by spreading panic about AIDS will, with any luck, help cut down on the teenage pregnancies that have become an ever-increasing source of anxiety and social pathology in all the urban centers of America. To those parents and others who are disturbed about the idea that the schools are not only instructing the city's children in methods for, but actually promoting, sexual easygoingness, condom advocates reply that "the kids are doing it anyway, so why not make it safer for them—and for the rest of us as well."

Anecdotal evidence suggests, though it is a bit too early to be certain, that the condom program is far from a smashing success (as anybody who actually knows anything about adolescents, sexually active or not, might have predicted). In condom-application classes the students are said to do a lot of giggling and cutting up, and very few of them have so far turned up at any of the various school health offices where the condoms are given out: "I'm not going to tell some school nurse when I'm going to get laid; it's none of her business," explained one young man to an inquiring reporter. Complaining parents have been assured by school officials that the program is in a tryout stage, only in effect in a few chosen schools, and no student is forced to take part in it.

For the rest, in the face of the ruckus of spring-fall 1992, Fernandez and his minions, having already backed down a bit in December, followed up with a few more compromises in January. As of that point, for example, instruction in the varieties of sexual intercourse will be deferred from the fifth grade to some later year. Nor will first-graders be taught about the happiness of having as parents what will now be called "same-gender" (instead of "lesbian/gay") couples; that, too, will be reserved for some later year. And in a move that invites speculation about the relative clout of female as against male homosexuals, *Heather Has Two Mommies* will be dropped from the reading list of the *Rainbow*, while *Daddy's Roommate* will be included in a new edition of the curriculum.

THE story does not end here, however. For the documents remain. Mary Cummins may have been less than elegant in her characterization of the *Rainbow* guide's message as "sodomy isn't particularly dangerous," but she was certainly accurate about its ultimate intention. As for the AIDS curriculum, the mind reels. Discuss the use of contraceptive barriers and creams with *eleven-year-olds*? Is someone *mad*?

The real problem here lies not with the homosexual activists who were invited to help write these documents, and who have their own agenda to pursue, but with those who invited them. The mayor, the chancellor, the bureaucrats, the teachers' union, the community leaders: how have they brought themselves to the point of trying to impose a course of homosexual propaganda on the schools with which they have been entrusted or over which they have sought to exert influence?

The answer is that, once again, children have been treated by the institutions of government as not much more than fodder for the cannons of passing political and cultural pressures. They have been bussed to schools far from home; they have, many of them, been deprived of the decent

* See "Teenaids," by Michael Fumento, the *New Republic*, August 10, 1992, for a detailed breakdown of the relevant statistics.

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use of English (remember Black English? and now there is bilingualism); they have been promoted from grade to grade without achievement; they have, in the name of self-respect, been told lies about the histories of Africa and the North American Indians. Nor does this exhaust the list. And now they have been lined up yet again for feeding to another cannon in the dangerous cultural wars of the day.

According to a recent poll, a large majority of New Yorkers support teaching about gay and lesbian families, AIDS education, and condom distribution—but only for children in junior high school and above. Yet would these New Yorkers feel the same way even about the upper grades if they saw such materials as a pamphlet called "Teens Have the Right . . ."? In this pamphlet, produced by the New York City Department of Health for distribution in the high schools, the kids are, among other things, instructed as follows:

> Use a latex condom for *any* sex where the penis enters another person's body. That means vaginal sex (penis into a woman's vagina), oral sex (penis into the mouth), and anal sex (penis into the butt).
>
> Use a dental dam (a thin square of rubber), an unrolled condom cut down one side, or plastic food wrap for oral sex (mouth on vagina) on a woman. Hold it over her vagina to keep her fluids from getting into your mouth.

And how would the approving New Yorkers feel about certain other materials, not yet in use in the schools but circulating among the city's so-called AIDS educators? A Hetrick-Martin guide for teaching teens, for instance, written by the same Andrew Humm who was given special thanks for his contribution to the HIV/AIDS curriculum, includes among its instructions for the proper application and use of condoms such tips as this:

> For oral sex, use no lubricant on the outside of the condom. For vaginal or anal intercourse, put a lot of water-soluble lubricant . . . on the outside of the condom. For anal intercourse, lube up the receptive partner's anus (asshole) as well. . . . Do it! (Have fun!)

Another lesson in this curriculum offers advice about the various kinds of sexual pleasure attainable without "ejaculating into one's partner":

> Possible [ways to have sex without engaging in actual intercourse] could include: mutual masturbation, kissing, sexy talk, frottage (Princeton rub), licking (toes, nipples, neck, etc.), watch sex movies together, suck balls, take a shower together, play games, dry humping massage, caressing, necking, dancing, playing strip poker, sleeping together, licking food (such as whipped cream) off each other, and so on.

This is the kind of thing that is moving at least some parents to rebel. And so this time they are fighting back—against the same cruel combination of dishonesty, cowardice, resignation to political pressure, and blind moral vanity by which they and their children have so often been bullied and victimized in the past. Minority though they may at the moment be, and whether in the end they win or lose, they have (as the ouster of Fernandez shows) at long last become a force to reckon with.

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The Rabbinic Imagination

Hillel Halkin

HAYYIM NAHMAN BIALIK and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky's *Sefer Ha-Aggadah*, now translated and published for the first time in English as *The Book of Legends*,[1] is a work of creative scholarship that makes the word "monumental" seem modest. First issued in six Hebrew volumes in Odessa between 1908 and 1911, it has been reprinted dozens of times in a standard Hebrew edition having 736 double-columned, nearly folio-size pages. The new English version, which preserves the format and almost all of the contents of the Hebrew, is physically even a bit bigger. This should deter no one from acquiring it, however, for it is not a book for a week, a month, or a year. Having consulted it often and with unfailing enchantment during the three decades that I have had it on my shelf, I can testify that its treasures are almost literally inexhaustible.

Yehoshua Ravnitzky was a Hebrew editor and publisher who formed a business partnership with the great Hebrew poet Bialik in 1901 when the two of them started an Odessan Hebrew publishing house named Moriah. The company's first commercial success was a series of annotated Bible stories for children that appeared between 1903 and 1905, which were also the years of Bialik's peak productivity as a poet; subsequently his powers declined sharply, so that by 1908, when he was only thirty-five and at the height of his authority in the Hebrew literary world, he had stopped writing serious poetry almost completely. It was partly to compensate for this drying-up that he now began to devote himself to a number of ambitious editorial projects that came under the rubric of what—giving an old Hebrew term a new meaning—he called *kinus*.

Literally, "gathering," *kinus* meant for Bialik salvaging and transmitting to future generations the literary heritage of a Jewish tradition which an increasingly nontraditional Hebrew-reading public was no longer willing or able to read in its original forms and contexts. In some instances, as in the case of medieval Hebrew poets like Yehuda Halevi and Solomon Ibn Gabirol, tradition itself had not bothered to preserve many important texts, which had to be culled and collated from numerous manuscripts and forgotten books; in others, the problem was not preservation but presentation. And nowhere was it greater than in the area of what Judaism calls Midrash or Aggadah,[2] a large anthology of which was Bialik and Ravnitzky's next major undertaking.

The reasons for this were several. In the first place, there was the sheer mass of the material. If we take the canonical corpus of Midrash to include all the non-legal sayings and stories attributed to and transmitted by the rabbis of the mishnaic and talmudic periods (an era extending roughly from 100 to 600 C.E.), we are speaking of more than a dozen major collections devoted exclusively to the genre that were either committed to writing during these centuries or written down later on the basis of oral traditions dating from them. In addition to all this, there are a vast number of aggadic passages embedded in various other texts, and above all in the 37 tractates of the Babylonian and the 39 tractates of the Palestinian Talmud. Thus, despite its great size, Bialik and Ravnitzky's *Sefer Ha-Aggadah* had to be based on a painstaking selection of a small fraction of the material eligible for inclusion in it.

WHEN an aggadah or several aggadot are found in the Talmud, their contextual relationship to the halakhic or legal text surrounding them is usually clear. Take, for example, a well-known story that we will shortly

HILLEL HALKIN, who lives in Israel, is a senior writer at the *Jerusalem Report* and a well-known translator and critic.

[1] Translated by William G. Braude, introduction by David Stern. Schocken Books, 897 pp., $75.00.

[2] Construed strictly, these two words are overlapping but not congruent. The Hebrew term *midrash* (from the verb *darash*, "to seek [meaning]" or "to expound") refers to any rabbinic commentary on a verse or group of verses in the Bible, while *aggadah* (from the verb *higgid*, "to tell" or "to relate") refers to any rabbinic legend, narrative, or parable. Thus, while a great deal of Midrash is Aggadah, there is Midrash that is not Aggadah—*midrashei halakhah*, for example, which are concerned solely with exegetical interpretations of biblical laws and commandments and have no narrative component at all—and there is Aggadah that is not Midrash, such as the many tales told by the rabbis about other rabbis that do not have a biblical verse as their point of departure. In nontechnical discussions of the subject, however, the two words are often used synonymously, and I will sometimes follow this practice here without worrying overly about consistency.

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consider in detail, that of Rabbi Akiva and his wife Rahel, which occurs in the talmudic tractate of *Ketubot*, a volume dealing with marriage contracts and the mutual obligations of husbands and wives. This story is told in the course of a halakhic treatment of the biblical commandment of *onah*, i.e., of a man's duty to attend to his wife sexually, and it follows another story about the son of Rabbi Hiyya and his wife, the daughter of Rabbi Yannai.

Since both these aggadot are about husbands who absented themselves for long periods from their homes for the purpose of studying Torah, it is self-evident what they are doing in the text. To be sure, there is no way of determining whether their presence here records their actual narration by someone during a rabbinical discussion of *onah*, or whether they were inserted at a later date by an editor because of their perceived relevance. But it is clear that the rabbis often did pause in the midst of debating complex legal issues to tell tales, swap anecdotes, and even make jokes that were sometimes included in the oral or written protocols of the proceedings. One can feel in reading the Talmud how such interruptions must have been welcome opportunities to relax from the ardors of legal argument—as they indeed are to this day for Talmud students who, exhausted from puzzling out the intricacies of a complicated halakhic passage, arrive with a sense of relief at an aggadic rest-stop in the middle of it.

When, on the other hand, one turns from the Talmud to a specific collection of midrashim, the internal logic of the aggadic material may at first glance seem less clear. This is because most of these collections are not structured topically, like halakhic literature, but rather by biblical verses. The historical origins of the method are obvious: in the period when Aggadah was still an entirely oral medium, its rabbinic specialists (or *ba'alei aggadot*) were expected to memorize many thousands of stories, parables, homilies, and exegetical interpretations and to be able to relate them on demand. Thus they needed some mnemonic principle of organization to facilitate the task; and since they all knew the Bible by heart, the handiest solution was to use each of its verses as a point of accretion—or, to alter the metaphor, as a string on which a large number of aggadic beads could be strung. Sometimes such a "bead" has an intrinsic relationship to the "string" it is on and sometimes it has one only to the "bead" before or after it, to which it may be linked by subtle associations of words and verses.

SUPPOSE we open *Bereshit Rabbah*, a volume whose "strings" are the verses of the Book of Genesis, and look at its commentary on Genesis 25:7-10. In Genesis we are told:[3]

> These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, a hundred and seventy-five years. And Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. And Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, the field which Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried with Sarah his wife.

Among the "beads" we find in *Bereshit Rabbah* are:

> *These are the days of the years of Abraham's life.* It says [in Psalms 37:18], "The Lord knows the days of the blameless, and their heritage will abide forever." "The Lord knows the days of the blameless"—this is Abraham, of whom it says [in Genesis 17:1] that he was blameless. "And their heritage will abide forever"—these are the years of Abraham's life, for the Holy One Blessed Be He so loves the righteous that He records even the years of their lives in the Torah that they might be our heritage.
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> * * * *
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> What is the difference between those who die young and those who die old? Rabbi Yehuda says, Think of a candle: when it goes out by itself [because it has burned down], all is well for it and its wick, and when it does not go out by itself, all is not well. Rabbi Abahu says, Think of a fig tree: when it is picked at the right time, all is well for it and its fruit, and when it is not picked at the right time, all is not well. It is said of Rabbi Hiyya and his students—and some say of Rabbi Akiva and his students—and some say of Rabbi Yosi bar Halafta and his students—that they were in the habit of rising early and sitting down to study beneath a certain fig tree, the owner of which rose early too in order to pick its fruit. They said to each other, "Perhaps he suspects us [of coveting the figs for ourselves]." What did they do? They changed places and went to study elsewhere. The owner of the tree then came to them and said, "Masters, why is it that once you did me the honor of studying Torah under my tree and now you have stopped?" "It was because we thought you suspected us [of coveting its fruit]," they told him. When he reassured them that this was not so, they resumed studying beneath the tree. Now, however, he no longer went early to pick its fruit every morning, and when the sun shone on it, it turned wormy. Then the students said to each other: "The tree's owner knew when the right time to pick its fruit was. So it is with the Holy One Blessed Be He, Who knows when it is the right time for the righteous to leave the world and takes them from it."
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> *At a good old age.* Rabbi Levi says, Of three men is it said that they died at a good old age. It is said of Abraham, and he deserved it. It is said of David, and he deserved it. It is said of Gideon, and he did not deserve it. Why not? Because it says [in Judges, 8:27], "And Gideon

[3] Unless indicated otherwise, all translations below are my own. The entire *Midrash Rabbah* is available in English in an edition published by the Soncino Press.

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made an ephod of it [the people's gold jewelry] and put it in his city"—he made it for idol worship.

And Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah. Here the son of the bondwoman paid homage to the son of the rightful wife.

In the field which Abraham purchased. Rabbi Tanhuma says, Since there were thirty-eight years between the burial of Sarah and the burial of Abraham, why does it say, "And Abraham was buried with Sarah"? The verse wishes to tell us that whoever paid his last respects to Sarah came to pay them to Abraham too. Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahman says, "Shem and Ever led the procession in front of [Sarah's] funeral bier and pointed to a place beside her [grave] that was reserved for Abraham."

Clustered around the biblical verses telling us of Abraham's death, we find here five different midrashim (the text of *Bereshit Rabbah* actually contains five more), the contents of which may be summed up as follows:

1. The occurrence of the word "blameless" (*tamim*) both in a verse in Genesis referring to Abraham and in a seemingly unrelated verse in Psalms teaches us that the verse in Psalms may be applied to Abraham too, and can be taken to mean that God determined the life span of the Patriarchs in advance and chose to tell us in the Torah exactly how long they lived because every detail regarding them is dear to Him.

2. Two implicitly opposed metaphors given by Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Abahu for the difference between death at an early and at an advanced age lead to a story that is a homiletic illustration of the metaphor of Rabbi Abahu. This aggadah has no direct relationship to the prooftext in Genesis but is associatively linked with the midrash preceding it.

3. It is pointed out that when the Bible tells us that someone died "at a good old age" (*be-sevah tovah*), this does not necessarily indicate divine approval of him, since in one of the three cases in which the phrase occurs in Scripture it refers to someone guilty of a grave sin.

4. The fact that in Genesis 25:9 Isaac is mentioned before his brother Ishmael even though Ishmael is the elder is interpreted as meaning that Ishmael, the son of Abraham's bondwoman Hagar, finally acknowledged his subservience to his younger brother after a lifetime of rivalry between them.

5. Rabbi Tanhuma and Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahman offer two different explanations of why the Bible tells us that Abraham was buried "with Sarah," even though he died long after her. Rabbi Shmuel's explanation is the more fanciful of the two and invokes the miraculous appearance at Sarah's funeral of Abraham's distant ancestors Shem and Ever—who, according to rabbinic legend, founded a yeshiva and were the world's first students of Torah. Since, according to this story, Shem and Ever used the occasion to show Abraham where he too would be buried, it is as if he and Sarah had been buried together.

WHAT did Bialik and Ravnitzky do with this passage in *Sefer Ha-Aggadah*? In a manner typical of their method in general, they passed over most of it; slightly edited the parts they did select, translating the Aramaic portions into Hebrew (like the Talmud, much of the Midrash alternates between the two languages); and reclassified those parts by subject matter.

Specifically, they chose two stories, the tale of the fig tree and the legend of Shem and Ever. The latter they placed in the original Volume I of their anthology, which is composed of midrashim on the narratives in the Bible, and the former in a section on death in Volume V, which deals with the human life cycle and is entitled "Man and His Needs." In addition, they listed each selection in a comprehensive index and accompanied it with textual notes in order to help the reader find and understand it.

Of course, quite apart from the question of their choices (an issue inherent in any anthology), the experience of reading Bialik and Ravnitzky's *Sefer Ha-Aggadah* is not the same as that of reading Midrash in its original form. The different "beads" on a midrashic "string" are indeed discrete units, just as Bialik and Ravnitzky treat them, and can be read independently of one another; but there is a challenge in negotiating one's way from one to the next, and insights to be gained from this into the workings of the rabbinic mind, which are missed when the material is processed and packaged in advance. Even the fact that *Sefer Ha-Aggadah* eliminates many midrashim that are perfectly ordinary or even tedious is not an unmixed blessing, for it can be one of the lesser delights of reading Midrash to stumble unexpectedly on a genuine narrative or homiletic diamond after plowing one's way through a good deal of chaff.

And yet none of this damage is irreparable. On the contrary: since *Sefer Ha-Aggadah* gives the source or sources of each of its entries, one can easily track these to their original location, and anyone who has used the book extensively knows that, far from acting as a barrier between the reader and the texts it anthologizes, it can serve as an invaluable pathway into them.

My speaking of "the source or sources" of *Sefer Ha-Aggadah*'s entries brings us to another salient feature both of the classical corpus of Midrash and of Bialik and Ravnitzky's treatment of it. To resort once more to our bead metaphor, it is perfectly possible and even common in the Midrash for the same bead, often with minor or major variations, to be found on more than one string. In fact, given the organization of the Midrash, this is inevitable.

Take, for example, Rabbi Levi's exegetical comment on dying "at a good old age." Since this refers to the story of Gideon in the Book of

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Judges no less than to that of Abraham in Genesis, we might expect to find it "strung" in both places—and indeed, in the *Yalkut Shimoni*, a later collection of midrashim than *Bereshit Rabbah*, we do find a lengthier version of the same exegesis attached to Judges 8:27 and attributed not to Rabbi Levi but to his son Shimon. In the Talmud, too, the same aggadah may be cited in more than one text, as is the case with the story of Rabbi Akiva and Rahel, which is found also—for reasons we soon shall see—in *Nedarim*, a tractate dealing with vows.

This multiplicity presented Bialik and Ravnitzky with both a problem and an opportunity. On the one hand, when the same aggadah was found in different versions, which were they to choose? On the other hand, if the different versions had different strengths that complemented or supplemented one another, why not maximize these by editing and combining the original texts into a single master-version that would be superior to any of its components? The second course was the one Bialik and Ravnitzky boldly chose, and its results comprise both the most creative and the most problematic aspect of their work, as can be seen from the story of Rabbi Akiva.

FIRST, let us look at the composite version of this story as it appears in *Sefer Ha-Aggadah*:

> Rabbi Akiva was Kalba-Shevua's shepherd. Kalba-Shevua's daughter Rahel saw that he was a modest but outstanding young man and said to him: "If I marry you, will you go to the study house [to become a scholar of Torah]?" He said to her: "Yes." And so she was secretly betrothed to him. When Kalba-Shevua found out, he banished her from his house and disinherited her, but she married Rabbi Akiva anyway. That winter they slept in a hayloft, and [every morning when they awoke] he picked the straw out of her hair. "If only I could," he said to her, "I would give you a Jerusalem-of-gold [a kind of gold pendant worn by brides]." Along came [the prophet] Elijah in the form of a [poor] man and stood in the doorway and said: "Please give me a little straw, because my wife has given birth and I have no bed for her to lie in." "Just look at this man," said Rabbi Akiva to his wife. "*He* does not even have straw!" "Go study in the study house!" she said to him. And so he went and spent twelve years in the study houses of Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua.
>
> When twelve years were up he returned home, bringing with him twelve thousand disciples. Everyone came out to greet him. His wife heard [that he had come] and went to greet him too. "Why don't you borrow some clothes so that you'll have something to wear?" her neighbors said to her. "The righteous man knoweth the soul of his beast of burden [a quote from Proverbs, 12:10]," she said to them. When she reached him she fell on the ground and kissed his feet. As his disciples were pushing her away, he said to them: "Let her be, for whatever is mine and whatever is yours is hers."
>
> Her father heard that a great scholar had arrived in town and thought: If I go see him, perhaps he can absolve me of my vow [to disinherit his daughter]. He went to see him. "Suppose you knew," said Rabbi Akiva, "that her husband would be a great scholar, would you still have banished her?" "Not even," said he, "if [I knew] he would know one chapter [of the Law], not even one single law!" "I am that man," said Rabbi Akiva. He fell on the ground and kissed Rabbi Akiva's feet and gave him half his fortune.

This brilliantly minimalistic tale demonstrates why, despite the great differences between the biblical and the rabbinic mind-set, the Bible and the Midrash form a single narrative tradition, the main features of which are extreme condensation, a preference for dialogue over description, a stark concentration on foreground, and an ability to create scenes of great dramatic power without the slightest resort to dramatic effects. Rahel's determination and bravery; Akiva's love for her; her ambition and willingness to sacrifice herself for him; the change twelve years have wrought in him and in their relationship; her father's painful contrition—all are conveyed with an extraordinary economy of means.

AND yet if we go back to the texts in the Talmud that this story is a blend of, we see that if it has gained something in the process of its amalgamation, it has lost something—and perhaps several things—too. Here are the original versions.

First, *Ketubot*:

> Rabbi Akiva was Kalba-Shevua's shepherd. Kalba-Shevua's daughter Rahel saw that he was a modest but outstanding young man and said to him: "If I marry you, will you go to the study house?" He said to her: "Yes." And so she wed him secretly and sent him [off to study]. When her father found out, he banished her from his house and disinherited her. Akiva went and sat for twelve years in the study house. When he returned, bringing with him twelve thousand disciples, he overheard [as he approached his home] an old man saying to Rahel: "How long will you go on being the widow of a living man?" She said to him: "If he were to listen to me, he would spend twelve more years in the study house." "In that case," said Rabbi Akiva [to his disciples], "I have her permission." And so he returned and spent twelve more years in the study house. When he came again, he brought twenty-four thousand disciples. His wife heard and went to greet him. "Why don't you borrow some clothes so that you'll have something to wear?" her neighbors said to her. "The righteous man knoweth the soul of his beast of burden," she said to them. When she reached him she fell on the ground and kissed his feet. As his disciples were pushing her away, he said to them: "Let her be, for whatever is mine and whatever is yours is hers."

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Her father heard that a great scholar had arrived in town and thought: If I go see him, perhaps he can absolve me from my vow. He went to see him. "Suppose you knew," said Rabbi Akiva, "that her husband would be a great scholar?" "Not even," said he, "[if he knew] one chapter, not even one single law!" "I am that man," said Rabbi Akiva. He fell on the ground and kissed Rabbi Akiva's feet and gave him half his fortune.

Now the version in *Nedarim*:

Rabbi Akiva betrothed Kalba-Shevua's daughter. When her father found out, he disinherited her. She was wed to him, and that winter they slept in a hayloft and he picked the straw out of her hair. "If only I could," he said to her. "I would give you a Jerusalem-of-gold." Along came Elijah in the form of a man and stood in the doorway and said: "Please give me a little straw, because my wife has given birth and I have no bed for her to lie in." "Just look at this man," said Rabbi Akiva to his wife. "*He* does not even have straw!" "Go study in the study house!" she said to him.

And so he [went and] was for twelve years with Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua. At the end of twelve years he returned home. When he was outside his house he heard a wicked person say to his wife: "Not only did your father do you wrong, you are the widow of a living man!" She said to him: "If he were to listen to me, he would spend twelve more years [in the study house]." "Since you've given me permission," he said, "I'll go back." He went back for twelve more years and returned with twenty-four thousand pairs of disciples. Everyone went out to greet him and so did she. "Where do you think you're going?" asked the same wicked person. "The righteous man knoweth the soul of his beast of burden," she said to him. She approached so that Akiva might see her, and as his disciples were pushing her away from him, he said to them: "Let her be, for whatever is mine and whatever is yours is hers." Her father heard and had himself absolved from his vow and restored her property [to her].

Ignoring the minor details, we can list the major differences between these two variants, and between them and Bialik and Ravnitzky's combination of them, as follows:

1. Whereas in *Ketubot* it is Rahel who takes the initiative in wedding Akiva and has her heart set from the start on his becoming a scholar, in *Nedarim* there is nothing of this. There we are simply told that Akiva betrothed her and there is no mention of her plans for him. *Sefer Ha-Aggadah* opts for the version in *Ketubot*.

2. The hayloft episode, all of which is incorporated by Bialik and Ravnitzky, is only in *Nedarim*.

3. Even though it is mentioned in both tractates, the detail of Akiva's going back to the study house for another twelve years after "receiving permission" from Rahel is omitted by Bialik and Ravnitzky entirely.

4. In *Ketubot*, when Akiva returns a second time, Rahel throws herself at his feet and kisses them; in *Nedarim*, she merely tries to catch his attention. *Sefer Ha-Aggadah* adopts the version in *Ketubot*.

5. Although in *Nedarim*, too, Kalba-Shevua relents in the end and restores his daughter's inheritance, the dramatic scene between him and Akiva that occurs in *Ketubot* is missing, as is *Ketubot*'s portrait of a man suffering deeply from remorse. Once again Bialik and Ravnitzky follow the latter tractate, in which Kalba-Shevua's vow is gotten around by his giving "half his fortune" to his daughter's husband rather than to his daughter directly.

One can say many things about these divergences, but two points need to be stressed particularly.

The first point is that the aggadot in *Ketubot* and *Nedarim* are only in a sense the same story, for they present two quite different pictures. That painted in *Ketubot* is essentially conflictless. In it, Akiva and Rahel are in perfect harmony all along, and while Rahel's self-deprivation has been great—her not even having a dress in which to greet her husband and his disciples tells us all we need to know about the poverty she has been living in all these years—it is clear that she has willingly accepted this as the price she has to pay for Akiva to achieve the greatness she believes he has in him.

This is not the case, however, in *Nedarim*, where Rahel, a young woman who has fallen in love with her father's hired hand, finds herself sleeping in a barn and married to a man who adores her but has no livelihood and apparently no prospects. Indeed, it is quite possible to interpret her "Go study in the study house" as little more than an angry jibe, as if—furious at Akiva for putting up so passively with the situation he has gotten her into—she were saying: If you are so unworldly-wise that you can find consolation in someone else's being even worse off than we are, you belong with the rabbis in the study house rather than with me in the real world! The rest of the aggadah would then be a tale not of *amor omnia vincit* but of reversal and estrangement, in which Rahel's "If he were to listen to me, he would spend twelve more years [in the study house]" is blurted out in angry sarcasm too, and Akiva's taking her up on it is the selfish reaction of a man so driven to succeed that he is indifferent to the misery of the woman he once loved above everything. It is no wonder that in this version Rahel does not kiss Akiva's feet when he finally returns to her.

But the second point is that Bialik and Ravnitzky obviously did not read the aggadah in *Nedarim* in this fashion, for if they had, they would have considered it incompatible with the aggadah in *Ketubot* and concluded that they had to choose between the two instead of fusing them.

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Indeed, their rather surprising omission of Akiva's first homecoming and re-departure, even though it is found in both texts, confirms that they read both in the harmonizing mode of *Ketubot*, since the only discernible motive for leaving out such a detail would have been the belief that it was inconsistent with the rest of the story—that is, that Akiva's behavior at this point, even if justified as far as the rabbis were concerned by the supreme importance of Torah study, strikes a discordant note in a narrative about a youthful love that prevails.

It is, therefore, important to realize that *Sefer Ha-Aggadah* is both scrupulously faithful to the aggadic texts that it gives us and extremely free with them. The faithfulness is lexical, for Bialik and Ravnitzky were punctilious about changing the actual language of the Midrash as little as possible, an aspect in which they differed greatly from other 20th-century anthologizers of Aggadah (like Michah Yosef Berditchevsky in Hebrew and Louis Ginzburg in English). It was their belief that the concise bareness of midrashic prose concealed a great vitality and purity which should never be compromised stylistically even if its sequential leaps and inferences were not always immediately evident to the modern reader; and that the Midrash was to be considered not as raw material for literary reworking but as a high form of narrative art itself.

And yet at the same time they did not hesitate to create new texts out of old on the assumption that, in the process of their transmission and redaction, many aggadot had been fragmented and needed to be restored to their original unity. In some cases, as in their reconstruction of the intensely moving story of the rabbinic heretic Elisha Ben-Avuyah, Bialik and Ravnitzky even drew on as many as half-a-dozen different textual sources. Thus, although one always can trust them in regard to the authenticity of tone and texture, allowances must be made for the fact that sometimes in *Sefer Ha-Aggadah* one is reading not an actual text but a hypothetical *Ur*-text which may in reality never have existed in such a form, or perhaps even at all.

Nevertheless, the fact that numerous aggadic texts are aesthetically complete and satisfying as we find them should leave no room for doubt that the *ba'alei aggadot* were the self-conscious literary artists that Bialik and Ravnitzky conceived them to be. Nor is there any point in reviving the old question—one that already has been beaten to death in Bible studies—of whether aesthetic or literary intentions can properly be ascribed to writings that were motivated first and foremost by other considerations.

It is no doubt the case that *kinus* implied for Bialik the "literarization" of a religious tradition which he no longer believed to be viable in itself; but just as we understand while standing in a Gothic cathedral or listening to a Bach oratorio that there is no contradiction between doing something for the glory of God and doing it as gloriously as possible, so there need be nothing false about our awareness that the *ba'alei aggadot* took justifiable pride in crafting their religious message with all the literary skill at their command. Long before the modern rediscovery of it, they invented the short-short story, and *The Book of Legends* is more than enough proof that they have yet to be equaled in their mastery of the form.

IT IS perhaps in part because until now so few midrashic texts have been available in translation that literary critics have related to the Bible and to the Midrash in two such different ways. To state the matter succinctly, the Bible has been widely written about in recent years as if it were a form of literature, the Midrash—less widely, but with a growing amount of attention—as if it were a form of literary criticism.

It is easy to understand why certain contemporary literary critics, especially those associated with what has come to be known as literary deconstruction, have clasped the authors of midrash to their bosoms like a traveler unexpectedly coming across close kin in a distant land. For not only is the Midrash a body of writing systematically organized around a previous body of writing, upon which it is in large measure a commentary, but the methods and assumptions of this commentary can strike one as having a modern ring. Like a Jacques Derrida, the rabbinical midrashists saw the object of their criticism, the Bible, as a legitimate arena in which to display all their virtuoso powers of interpretation, even if this meant overwhelming and in a sense defeating the text itself; and in the words of a Harold Bloom, their achievement is thus a perfect example of "strong misreading," the simultaneous elevating and undermining of a work by first claiming it as a canonical authority and then systematically substituting revisionary meanings for its own.

Indeed, these substitutions, or "displacements," in the language of deconstruction, were often so blatant that it is hard to think their perpetrators were not aware of them. Did the rabbis really believe that a verse in Psalms could refer to Abraham, even though he is not mentioned once in that entire book? That Shem and Ever attended the funeral of Sarah? Or that thousands of others of their interpretations of the Bible could have made any sense to the men and women written about in its pages?

There is actually some evidence that not all of them did so believe, at least not in the ordinary sense of believing. For example, another well-known aggadah about Rabbi Akiva tells us:[4]

> Rabbi Judah said in the name of Rav: When Moses ascended on high, he found the Holy

[4] The translation here is William G. Braude's, in the new Schocken edition.

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> One affixing crowns to letters.[5] Moses asked, "Lord of the universe, [why use crowns to intimate what You wish]? Who hinders Your hand [from writing out in full all of Torah's precepts]?" God replied, "At the end of many generations there will arise a man, Akiva ben Joseph by name, who will infer heaps and heaps of laws from each tittle on these crowns." "Lord of the universe," said Moses, "permit me to see him." God replied, "Turn around." Moses went and sat down behind eight rows [of Rabbi Akiva's disciples and listened to their discourse on law]. Not being able to follow what they were saying, he was so distressed that he grew faint. But when they came to a certain subject and the disciples asked Rabbi Akiva, "Master, where did you learn this?" and Rabbi Akiva replied, "It is a law given to Moses at Sinai," Moses was reassured. He returned to the Holy One and said, "Lord of the universe, You have such a man, yet You give the Torah [not by his hand but] by mine?" God replied, "Be silent—thus has it come to My mind." Then Moses said, "Lord of the universe, You have shown me his Torah—now show me his reward." "Turn around," said God. Moses turned around and saw Rabbi Akiva's flesh being weighed out in a meat market.[6] "Lord of the universe," Moses cried out, "such Torah, and such its reward?" God replied, "Be silent—thus has it come to My mind."

Not the least startling thing about this truly audacious story is the protest it ends with, but this is not why I have cited it. In fact, what precedes the bitterly cynical depiction of God's justice is hardly less astonishing, for it amounts to an open confession that rabbinical hermeneutics read meanings into the Torah that are not there. Not that Rav, the author of this aggadah, would have put it that way. What he presumably would have said, had he spoken in modern language rather than ancient parable, is that all the legitimate meanings that can be attributed to the Torah *are* there, but that not all of them would have been comprehensible to Moses or to anyone of his or many later generations, since uncovering the full contents of Scripture is the unending task of Jewish interpretation that unfolds from age to age.

It is precisely this about the Midrash that most speaks to the deconstructionists, who hold that *all* reading is historically and socially conditioned interpretation, and that there is no such thing as "objective meaning" in a text, since literary meaning is something generated only in the written word's encounter with a reader. As stated by Susan Handelman, one of the leading proponents of the view of midrash as a kind of proto-deconstruction,

> As a mode of reading, midrash takes delight in precisely those aspects of language to which post-structuralist criticism has alerted us. It is acutely sensitive to the semantic overflow of language and the rhetorical nature of Scripture as something to indulge . . . [and as] a field of play . . . for the extreme puns, transpositions, acontextual readings, reversals of meaning, [and] "free association" which [it] accomplishes.

Of course, there are fundamental differences between a Rabbi Levi "playing" with a verse from Genesis to make it mean something that no one but he would ever find in it and, let us say, a Jacques Derrida "playing" similarly with a poem by Paul Celan. For one thing, although midrash can indeed exhibit a high degree of playfulness in its treatment of biblical texts, underlying this is a serious assumption. The rabbis held that God's mind was infinite and that the Torah was His Word; therefore, it was not illogical for them to believe that this Word could be endowed with infinite meanings which the unique perspectives of individual readers could reveal. By contrast, Celan, poetic genius though he may have been, was a finite being, and there is therefore a sense in which it is quite possible to say, "This is not Celan but Derrida," and frivolous to deny the distinction between the two.

Nor is it remotely true that the midrashist was the absolute sovereign of the biblical text and could do whatever he pleased with it. As in all meaningful play, the formal constraints or "rules of the game" imposed on him were many, and included an allegiance to all the main dogmas of rabbinic Judaism. Thus, when the New Testament and the Church Fathers proposed their own "midrashic" reading of the Bible, the rabbis fought it tooth and nail, without stopping to ask whether the differences between the Jewish and Christian interpretations of Scripture might not be, after all, merely subjective.

Still, genuine parallels between midrash and deconstruction do exist, not the least of which is their sharing a similar etiology. There are many reasons why midrash developed, among them the fact that the spare style of the Bible leaves "spaces" between the words which all but compel the reader to occupy them interpretively. But in addition, Handelman is surely right when she observes that

> The rabbis had to get around the problem of closure of the canon, the loss of the direct, oracular voice of God. . . . They had, then [in the words of the mishnaic sage Ben Bag-Bag], to turn and turn Scripture, reopen it by turning it over on itself.

Given a situation, in other words, in which there were more and more generations of rabbis but always the same, unexpandable sacred text, something like midrash was unavoidable if rabbinic Judaism were not—as happened with many other ancient religions—to stagnate and petrify.

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[5] The crowns (*tagin*) are three small strokes that are added to the top of certain letters in a Torah scroll (Braude).

[6] Rabbi Akiva died a martyr's death at the hands of the Romans during the Hadrianic persecution (Braude).

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It is a pity that Handelman does not extend this analysis to her own milieu, for it would seem obvious that a major reason deconstruction and its attitudes have spread so successfully in literature departments of universities is the existence of a parallel situation. Since the number of important literary texts deserving serious study is limited and grows extremely slowly, while in recent times the number of literary critics, English professors, and Ph.D.'s has increased by leaps and bounds, is not deconstruction as self-interested an enterprise as midrash? Shakespeare will write no new plays, but Shakespeare scholars will continue to be turned out, and sooner or later the last word will have been said on every "objective" meaning, nuance, and subtlety in the corpus. If a permanent moratorium on Shakespeare studies is not to be declared, what choice is there but to pass from the realm of the ostensibly objective determination of form and content in the plays to that of "transpositions, acontextual readings, reversals of meaning, and free association," in which these same texts can be "reopened" by "turning them over on themselves"?

THIS is not to say that because deconstruction can itself be deconstructed it does not rest upon some valid assertions. But although its practitioners may sometimes be excellent critics of criticism, they tend to be poor critics of texts, which they are too busy trying to misread strongly to read attentively. In this respect, too, they bear a resemblance to the rabbis of the Midrash, for perhaps the greatest paradox of the Midrash is that this remarkable edifice of commentary built around the Bible often seems to miss the Bible's point completely. And this is especially true when it comes to biblical stories that are morally ambiguous, for the same rabbis who eagerly ferreted out every verbal ambiguity in Scripture as an occasion for exegetical resolution had, in a larger sense, little tolerance for ambiguity in the Bible.

Consider the typical-enough midrash in *Sefer Ha-Aggadah* on Genesis 27:30-34, which relates the story of Jacob's stealing of Esau's blessing. In the Bible itself, while the wily Jacob, the eponymous ancestor of Israel, is portrayed as doing what his destiny requires, the tragic figure of Esau is drawn with great sympathy:

> And as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from hunting. And he also prepared savory food, and he brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father arise, and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me." And his father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your son, your first-born, Esau." Then Isaac was seized with great terror and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed." And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!"

Yet here, from the new English translation of *Sefer Ha-Aggadah*, is the commentary on these lines from *Midrash Tanhuma*:

> When Esau finally entered the house, he called to his father in a rude tone, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's venison." . . . Jacob, however, had not spoken in the same tone, but said, "Arise, I pray thee, sit and eat"—both "I pray thee" and the three verbs implying respectful entreaty, humility, and submissiveness. . . .
>
> At that moment, Isaac recognized Esau's voice and, seized with fear, asked Esau, "Who are you?" For when Jacob had come in, the fragrance of the Garden of Eden, a sweet savor, came in with him, and Isaac, feeling refreshed, exclaimed, "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of the field [of Eden] which the Lord hath blessed," as he proceeded to bless him. But when Esau came in, Gehenna gaped wide before Isaac, so that "Isaac was seized with great terror." Perturbed in his heart, he said to himself: I see Gehenna with Esau's body kindling the fire therein.

Linguistically, it should be pointed out, this midrash has not a leg to stand on. Esau's "Let my father arise and eat" (*yakum avi ve'yokhal*) is actually more, not less, respectful and tender than Jacob's "Arise, I pray thee, sit and eat" (*kum-na shva ve'okhla*), and indeed, the Bible has already told us that Esau is closer to his father and Jacob to his mother. But the rabbis liked their biblical heroes white and their biblical villains black; and Esau's having been considered a symbol of Christianity—talk of acontextual readings!—did nothing to further his standing with them.

THE Midrash, then, tells us little of value about the Bible, which—to the extent that we wish to understand it on its own terms rather than have it mediated for us by the rabbis—is best read without aggadic commentary. What it does tell us an enormous amount about, and masterfully, is the rabbis themselves: their world, their thoughts, their lives, their struggles, their fears, doubts, rivalries, ambitions, their fierce pride in their accomplishments. Like the Bible, which it often challenges and next to which it is the greatest collective creation of the Jewish imagination, the Midrash deserves to be read not for its techniques of reading but for its superb writing. By making a vast body of it available in its original form, *The Book of Legends*, well-translated by Rabbi William Braude, who died in 1988 shortly after completing the herculean task he took upon himself, opens a new continent to English readers that they will not quickly finish exploring.

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Reading Montaigne

Joseph Epstein

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE (1533-92) put the capital I, the first person, into literature, and while he was at it also invented the essay. When he took up the writing of his *Essays*, in 1572, Montaigne was the first man to write freely about himself, and not for another two centuries, until Jean Jacques Rousseau, would anyone do so with such unabashed candor again. Chiding Tacitus for undue modesty, Montaigne remarked that "not to dare to talk roundly of yourself betrays a defect of thought." This, clearly, was not Montaigne's defect. "I not only dare to talk about myself but to talk of nothing else but myself." That is not quite true; he talks about a great deal else in the *Essays*. Yet there was something to what he said when he added: "I study myself more than any other subject. That is my metaphysics; that is my physics."

Inscribed on the tympanum of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi was the legend, "Know Thyself." This was the project Montaigne set to work on when in 1570, at the age of thirty-seven, he retired from public life to the tower on his estate in Gascony in which he kept his library of a thousand or so books. Montaigne not only believed in the importance of knowing himself but thought there was scarcely anything better, or even else, worth knowing. "I would rather be an expert on me than on Cicero," he writes in his essay "On Experience," and in "On Physiognomy" he writes, "I am wandering off the point when I write about anything else, cheating my subject of me." But the more important point is that he made of the study of himself an epistemology: from knowledge of himself, he believed, all other knowledge flowed.

Had Montaigne not chosen himself for his subject, in time someone else would no doubt have come along to write about himself with the same degree of candor—but not, the great likelihood is, with the same degree of success. What makes Montaigne's invention of the personal essay so extraordinary is that he not only was its first practitioner but may also have been, to date, its best. He set out the program for the personal essay—loose, digressive, elastic, familiar: "free association, artistically controlled," is the way Aldous Huxley described Montaigne's method—and then produced it in a quantity of more than a thousand pages. The impressive, the really quite astonishing thing is that Montaigne never bores on the subject of *me*; far from wishing him to go on to take up other matters, one is always rather pleased when he returns to it, even about such trivial things as his changing taste for radishes.

Montaigne also had the unteachable, the really quite unexplainable gift of being absolutely a man of his time who, four centuries later, reads pertinently as a man of ours. As D.P. Walker, the distinguished medievalist, has written:

> In many ways Montaigne was a startlingly original and independent thinker; but this can only be appreciated if one has some knowledge of relevant contemporary and earlier thought, for the most fundamental of Montaigne's new ideas and attitudes have become our own unquestioned assumptions.

Among these are the high valuation he placed on what is individual, private, original, and different. Modern, too—or so one would like to think—is his rejection of all dogmatic systems of thought. (How amusing he would have been on Marx and Freud, the two crushing systematizers of the modern era!) Finally, he strikes the modern note in his self-absorption, which, D.P. Walker avers, was entirely radical for its day. Not until Rousseau's *Confessions* (1781) was there another work of self-portrayal like the *Essays*, and Montaigne's book, though written two centuries earlier, both feels more contemporary and is much wiser.

None of this would have been possible if Montaigne had not been precisely the man he was. "Authors," he wrote,

> communicate themselves to the public by some peculiar mark foreign to themselves; I—the first ever to do so—by my universal being, not as a grammarian, poet or jurisconsult but [as] Michel de Montaigne. If all complain that I talk too much about myself, I complain that they never even think about their own selves.

The American critic Van Wyck Brooks once defined literature as "a great man writing." The

JOSEPH EPSTEIN is the editor of the *American Scholar* and the author of six books of essays and a collection of short stories. A new book, *Pertinent Players: Essays on the Literary Life*, will be brought out by Norton in August.

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definition fits Montaigne exquisitely. But then Montaigne was himself exquisitely well fitted—by birth, by temperament, by talent—for the kind of writing he did.

Born in 1533 at his family's chateau between Bordeaux and Périgord, Michel Eyquem de Montaigne was, on his father's side, the son of a long line of successful merchants who only four generations earlier had purchased their title of nobility and with it the name Montaigne. His mother's was a family of Spanish Jews (named Louppes or Lopez), with connections in Antwerp, who had outwardly accepted Christianity without ever fully dispelling the suspicions of their neighbors. In his excellent biography of Montaigne, the late Donald Frame remarks that most attempts to explain Montaigne's mind and temper by the 25 percent of Jewish blood that ran in his veins have been properly cautious, as is Frame's own:

> Probably attributable to it in some measure are his deep tolerance in an age when that was not in fashion; a rather detached attitude, typical of the Marranos and natural in them, toward the religion he consistently and very conscientiously practiced [Roman Catholicism]; his tireless curiosity, mainly but not solely intellectual; the cosmopolitanism natural to the member of a far-flung family.

In the *Essays*, Montaigne makes only one, insignificant, mention of his mother, while he often refers to Pierre Eyquem de Montaigne, more than once as "the best of all fathers."

Montaigne was indeed fortunate in his father, who though not learned himself had great regard for learning, who had served as mayor of Bordeaux, and who took great care with his eldest son Michel's education (Montaigne had four brothers and three sisters). This education was far from conventional. Montaigne's first tutor was a German who spoke Latin but no French, and so the boy was brought up speaking Latin exclusively until the age of six (his parents and household servants acquired enough Latin to converse with him). When he went off to school he had less luck with Greek and thought himself, as a boy, a lazy and unretentive student. Fortunately, he acquired a love of reading, especially of Latin literature, that would never leave him, even though in later life he regularly demoted the importance of books in his own education.

Little is known about Montaigne's adolescence and early manhood. It is thought that he studied law in Toulouse. In 1557, at twenty-four, he became a *conseiller*, or magistrate, at the *parlement* in Bordeaux. Here he met his dear friend, his soul-mate really, Etienne de La Boétie, of whom he wrote that "his was indeed an ample soul, beautiful from every point of view, a soul of the Ancient mold." The loneliness from Boétie's early death is sometimes said to be what caused Montaigne to turn to writing. He married in 1565, and he and his wife subsequently lost all but one of their children, a daughter Léonor.

After the death of his father in 1568, Michel became head of his family and lord over its estates. Complying with a wish of his father's, he translated Raymond Sebond's lengthy *Natural Theology*, which was published in 1569, from Latin into French; his "Apology for Raymond Sebond" would later become the longest of his essays. He resigned from work at the *parlement* at Bordeaux in 1570, retiring to Montaigne, where, in the tower he used as a study, he soon began the experimental writing that would result in the *Essays*. He would later, between 1581 and 1585, serve as mayor of Bordeaux, as his father had done before him, and his mature years were spent with his country riven by civil war over the Reformation. It is almost as if Montaigne had acquired just enough experience out of which to write, yet not so much as to despise the role of somewhat distanced observer that is central to the act of writing.

Montaigne's *Essays* is, as advertised, a great book. It is also in the category of great large books. (In M.A. Screech's lucid new translation,* the text of Montaigne's *Essays* runs to 1,269 pages.) I have read in it for years, but have only now for the first time read through it. As in reading other great books of magnitude—*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, War and Peace, Remembrance of Things Past*—one feels a sadness at coming to its conclusion. One has lived in the close company of an extraordinary man, swayed for weeks to the undulations of his mind, and now, at book's end, it is over. The Harvard economic historian Alexander Gerschenkron has told of coming to the end of *War and Peace* with this feeling of sadness so heavy upon him that he paused, sighed, and then turned the novel over and began it again from the beginning.

Montaigne would have appreciated that digression if not necessarily the point. He is himself the most digressive of writers, always ready to tell a story, often from the chronicles of ancient history which he loved—usually to illustrate a point but sometimes, too, just because he thinks it a good story. In his essays he found the form that best fit the shape of his own mind.

"Essay," it is generally noted, comes from the French verb *essayer*: to try, to attempt. In bringing up this etymology most people wish to underscore the tentativeness of the form. Such modesty does not at all apply to Montaigne, who, while not out for the last word or seeking to be in any way definitive, nonetheless has fairly larger things in mind than the intellectual equivalent of a stroll around the garden.

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* Allen Lane, Penguin Press, $60.00.

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Nor are the *Essays* merely a variety of disquisitions upon what its author happens to think on such subjects as Vanity, Experience, Sadness, Fear, Liars, and the rest, even though such words appear in the titles of his essays. Montaigne's project was both much more and much less programmatic than this. Better to think of what he wrote not as essays, in the sense we have come to think of the form, but as assays—"'assays,'" as Professor Screech writes in his introduction to his new translation, "of himself by himself." The critic Erich Auerbach, in his chapter on Montaigne in *Mimesis*, suggests that the word "essay" as Montaigne used it might be rendered "Tests Upon One's Self" or "Self-Try-Outs." On behalf of his own revolutionary endeavor, the quotatious Montaigne cites the pre-Socratic philosopher Thales, of whom he remarks that "when Thales reckons that a knowledge of man is very hard to acquire, he is telling him that knowledge of anything else is impossible." How pleasing it must have been to Montaigne that in his own lifetime the scholar Justus Lipsius called him "the French Thales"!

What Montaigne is after in his essays is a method of discovering the meaning of such truths as he thinks available to man by studying the man he knows better than any other—himself. Sounds, in theory, easy enough. In practice, of course, it isn't. To acquire larger truths about the world by looking into one's heart is only possible if one is able to command an impressive honesty. Many other things are more likely to command *us*: bias, self-deceit, vanity, to name only three from a probably endless list. In the very first of the essays in his book, Montaigne avers that "man is indeed miraculously vain, various, and wandering"—and that, you might say, ain't a hundredth of it.

To italicize the difficulty of his venture, Montaigne writes in his brief essay "On Lying" that upon retiring to his estates, he had hoped to let his mind play upon itself, "calmly thinking of itself." As it turned out, nothing of the kind happened. Instead, his idleness resulted in his being visited by so "many chimeras and fantastic monstrosities" that he began to keep a record of them, "hoping in time to make my mind ashamed of itself." Writing, for him, began as a form of self-administered therapy.

From this failure—a failure that nearly resulted in a nervous breakdown—Montaigne came to discover his form. "Where I seek myself I cannot find myself," he writes; "I discover myself more by accident than by inquiring into my judgment." He began, in his early essays, to consider the thought of the ancient writers, occasionally touching on his own thoughts and experiences. Soon his essays began to feature these thoughts and that experience. His models were Seneca and Plutarch, whom he quotes perhaps more than any other writers. (He claimed the *Essays* were "built entirely of [Seneca and Plutarch's] spoils.") The discrete essays—some 107 of them—are in some ways perhaps better thought of as chapters; they range considerably in length, from a single page to nearly 200 pages. Montaigne called them "this confused medley of mine," and he found other self-denigrating ways of referring to them, not least vividly as "*des excréments d'un viel esprit*" ("the droppings of an ancient spirit"), "grotesques and monstrous bodies, pieced together of divers members without definite shape, having no order, sequence, or proportion other than accident." In fact, the *Essays* are a running chronicle of the mind of Michel de Montaigne. In his view he never loses the thread of his thought, even if his reader may, and he holds that, though he may seem to contradict himself, "I never contradict the truth."

IF EVER the maxim about the style being the man applied to a writer, it applied to Montaigne. Erich Auerbach remarks that, after reading a good deal of Montaigne, he thought he "could hear him speak and see his gestures." And Montaigne evidently wrote as he spoke, and spoke as he felt—directly, candidly, straightforwardly:

> The speech I love is a simple, natural speech, the same on paper as in the mouth; a speech succulent and sinewy, brief and compressed, not so much dainty and well-combed as vehement and brusque . . . rather difficult than boring, remote from affectation, irregular, disconnected, and bold; each bit making a body in itself; not pedantic, not monkish, not lawyer-like, but rather soldierly.

Montaigne's was a style at once ironic, playful, metaphoric, slangy, image-laden, self-deprecatory, commonsensical, and never abstract. "His is not an incapacity for abstractions," Donald Frame writes, "but a happy incapacity for expressing it other than concretely." He could ramble, his sentences could be overly elaborate, but always he strove to mesh substance to style, thought to form. He preferred not to be praised for his style, lest style seem to obscure his content. Content was his chief concern, for he felt that the contents of his book and of his mind were "consubstantial." "How I would hate the reputation of being clever at writing but stupid at everything else," he notes. Yet style is the preservative of literature, and Montaigne's is the style of a man you trust. "He was the frankest and honestest of writers," wrote Emerson, who added that he did not know any book "that seems less written."

"I think I am an ordinary sort of man," Montaigne writes, "except in considering myself to be one." The *Essays* demonstrate how extraordinary an ordinary sort of man can be. As the book progresses, ordinariness becomes a kind of virtue, for to be ordinary, by which he means human, is high praise from Montaigne. He has his own little pantheon of heroes—Homer,

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Alexander the Great, the Theban general Epaminondas, and above all Socrates (revered for his naturalness) occupying prominent places in it. Yet his is chiefly a comic view of life—no matter how high the throne, Montaigne notes, even a king sits upon his arse—if a comic view that, somehow, does not deprive men of their dignity. He laughs at other men by laughing first at himself.

"Everyone recognizes me in my book," Montaigne writes, "and my book in me." Quite as interestingly, everyone recognizes himself in Montaigne. The temptation in reading him is to discover oneself in him—and, of course, to admire him (and oneself) correspondingly. Even Flaubert, who felt little commonality with anyone, felt much in common with Montaigne, whom he claimed to regard as a foster father. Emerson said of the *Essays* that "it seemed to me as if I had myself written the book, in some former life, so sincerely it spoke to my thought and experience." André Gide remarked of Montaigne that "it seems to me that he is myself." Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, writing to Sir Frederick Pollock, noted: "I told you I believe that late in life I have discovered Montaigne and have read him with enormous delight. The beast knows a lot of things that I fondly hoped had been reserved for me."

Of the two great categories of writers—those who tell us things we do not know and those who formulate those things that have always been in our hearts but which we have had neither the time nor more likely the wit to formulate on our own—Montaigne is foremost among the latter. He claimed for self-knowledge that from it he could understand other men, but it turns out that it works quite well the other way around, so that from our knowledge of him we can learn about ourselves. Along with formulating our own thoughts for us, what makes Montaigne seem so close to us, his readers, is his gift for intimacy. This man who has looked into his own heart has in the course of doing so looked into ours, and reverberations from our own life sound on his nearly every page.

MONTAIGNE speaks to us because he speaks for us. He claims that, for him, "there is no savor without communication." But to whom, in his *Essays*, did Montaigne think he was communicating? When the first two of the ultimately three books of the *Essays* were published in 1580, they were a commercial success if not quite a best-seller. Yet, pleased though he was with this success, Montaigne nonetheless continued to write chiefly for himself. His essays were above all a form of self-discovery. Montaigne says literally up front, in his opening note to the reader, what he is about:

> You have here, Reader, a book whose faith can be trusted, a book which warns you from the start that I have set myself no other end but a private family one. I have not been concerned to serve you nor my reputation: my powers are inadequate for such a design. . . . If my design had been to seek the favor of the world I would have decked myself out better and presented myself in a studied gait. Here I want to be seen in my simple, natural, everyday fashion, without striving or artifice: for it is my own self that I am painting. Here, drawn from life, you will read of my defects and my native form so far as respect for social convention allows: for had I found myself among those peoples who are said still to live under the sweet liberty of Nature's primal laws, I can assure you that I would most willingly have portrayed myself whole, and wholly naked.

After this note, Michel de Montaigne began writing the most personal book in the history of the world.

To write a personal book, it is best to have a personality—and, to go along with it, the impersonality required by the highest art to set it out properly. "The essays," Virginia Woolf wrote of Montaigne's book, "are an attempt to communicate a soul." Here is a task that requires candor, lucidity, honesty, persistence. For as Virginia Woolf also wrote, apropos not of Montaigne but of all personal essayists of whom he remains the father: "Far beyond the difficulty of communicating oneself, there is the supreme difficulty of being oneself." Discovering who exactly he was is part of the motive behind Montaigne's book. When he said that the study of himself was his metaphysics and his physics, he meant that subjective truth was sufficient for him. "I do not see the whole of anything," he writes. "Nor do those who promise to show it to us."

Intellectual method was of little use to Montaigne. In logic he found crippling, even laughable, limitations—for logic, as he puts it, provides no consolation for gout. Even the senses cannot be counted upon. This notion is at the center of the "Apology for Raymond Sebond," the longest essay in Montaigne's book and the only one with a directly polemical intent. In that essay, Montaigne sets out after rationalism, whose chief internal danger he views as establishing the belief in men that they can achieve universal truth outside religion, through the sheer power of their reasoning. Montaigne mocks the attempt. Jacob Zeitlin, in a brilliant introductory commentary to his 1934-36 translation of the *Essays*, characterizes the "Apology for Raymond Sebond" as an "exercise of the rational process to degrade the principle of reason." It is in the "Apology" that Montaigne writes, "When I play with my cat, how do I know that she is not passing time with me rather than I with her?" This may seem a trivial enough question but is in fact the nub of the matter, asking, in the most particular and concrete terms, how do we know anything? "There is a plague on man: his opinion that he knows something."

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Owing to this essay, Montaigne was thought to be hostage to Pyrrhonism, named after the founder of Greek skepticism. Pyrrhonians doubted the efficacy even of doubt itself. Montaigne writes of them: "If you can picture an endless confession of ignorance, or a power of judgment which never, never inclines to one side or the other, then you can conceive what Pyrrhonism is." Behind the polemic in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond" is Montaigne's concern that men will make the horrendously arrogant mistake of believing that they are in control of their own destinies. "So long as man thinks he has means and powers deriving from himself he will never acknowledge what he owes to his Master." It is in the "Apology" that he writes, "In truth we are but nothing."

Such utterances would lead one to think Montaigne a seriously religious man, even though Sainte-Beuve believed that, in writing an "Apology for Raymond Sebond," he was attempting covertly to attack Christianity. From the *Essays* we have Montaigne's claim that he believes in the orthodoxy of the Roman Catholic Church and that he believes it on the authority of the Scriptures. "The more we refer ourselves to God," he writes, "commit ourselves to Him and reject ourselves, the greater we are worth." He adds: "Socrates' verdict—and mine as well—is that the best judgment you can make about the heavens is not to make any at all." Aristotle, Plato, even the otherwise inevitably sensible Plutarch he finds foolish on the subject of what happens to the soul after death. How should a simpler man, a man like Montaigne (or you and me), know better than they? Outwardly conventional in his religious views and practice, Montaigne appears to have rested in his own version of fideism, or faith based on a deep skepticism about all human knowledge.

Religion as the complicated relations, fueled by faith, between men and God is a subject Montaigne is content to leave alone. Only man's debt to God, which is total, is acknowledged. "But there can be no first principles," he avers, "unless God has revealed them; all the rest—beginning, middle, and end—is dream and vapors." Quotatious though he is, Montaigne rarely quotes Scripture. Here, as in many another realm, the question he had had engraved on a medal, *Que scay-je?* (What do I know?), which might serve as the motto for the *Essays*, applies most of all. He is instead keen on how to achieve the maximum contentment out of a life down upon which vicissitudes of every sort rain—how to find order and such happiness as is available here on earth.

No small problem, this, not least because of the changeability that Montaigne finds in himself and, by extension, in human nature. As with his own nature, so with the world at large, everything seems mutable. "For all we know," he remarks of the leading theories of planetary rotation of his day, "in a thousand years' time another opinion will overthrow both." As with knowledge, so with thought:

> Once you start digging down into a piece of writing there is simply no slant or meaning—straight, bitter, sweet, or bent—which the human mind cannot find there.

Not even the truth that the senses convey can be trusted: "The senses deceive the intellect; it deceives them in their turn. (Love someone and she seems more beautiful than she is.)" With theories, opinion, custom, knowledge, even our senses forever changing, Montaigne concludes that he "would rather be guided by results than by reason—for [the two] are always clashing." He reminds his readers of the ideal, much admired by Aristotle and by the Pyrrhonists, of being "astonished by nothing." In the end, Montaigne concludes, only God is. Only God and, one might add, Michel de Montaigne.

This last-named fellow, despite his many protestations about his shortcomings, is far from negligible. For if we cannot trust either knowledge or our senses, and if we can only by our best lights be obedient to but cannot hope to fathom the design of God, what guidance do we then turn to in the hope of living our lives with a modicum of decency, dignity, and contentment? The short answer, for Montaigne, is to understand experience rightly and to quest for understanding human nature, with the additional proviso that "there is no end in our inquiries; our end is in the other world." Yet the short answer is less impressive than the long. The long answer is the *Essays*. In fact, Montaigne claims not to be in the business of supplying answers at all. "*Je n'enseigne pas, je raconte*" ("I do not teach, I tell"), he writes. But, as with most people who claim not to teach, especially writers, he lies.

If Montaigne does teach, he does not preach. Very little self-righteousness pops up in the pages of the *Essays*. He was well aware of the traps implicit in writing about himself: "Condemn yourself and you are always believed; praise yourself and you never are." The author of the *Essays*, unlike so many writers, ancient and modern, never implies that he is the sole repository of virtue, even while freely criticizing his age. His modesty seems suitable, his humility genuine, and if both cannot always be entirely believed, for Montaigne had a delicate ironic touch, neither is ever overdone. ("Don't be so humble," Golda Meir is alleged to have said as Prime Minister of Israel to a member of her cabinet, "you're not that great.") As with any book of this length, there are longueurs in the *Essays*, and Montaigne can sometimes disappoint on a subject he proposes to take up by dissipating it through excessive quotation and digression. But his greatness lies in his temperament.

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By temperament I mean that the elements of Montaigne's character, the humors as the medievals would say, were wonderfully well mixed in him. It is the complexity of his character, which he seems not only never to wish to hide but increasingly to divulge, that wins us to him. "I describe myself standing up and lying down, from the front and back, from right and left, and with all my inborn complexities." He could make a joke, he could take a blow, he could live with paradox. To his mind, "Good Luck and Bad Luck are two sovereign powers. There is no wisdom in thinking that the role of Fortune can be played by human wisdom."

Part of the seductiveness of Montaigne's thinking lies in his understanding of both the limitations of, and at the same time the need for, wisdom. Nowhere is this better brought out than in his writing about the body. Montaigne distrusted saints and disliked fanatics because they pretended to despise the body. "Aristippus championed only the body, as though we had no soul," he writes, "Zeno championed only the soul, as though we had no body. Both were flawed." Montaigne, on the contrary, thought the chances for contentment were greatly lessened until the body and soul could be somehow aligned; until such time, the human being was incomplete. He writes openly about his bodily appetites and functions—about food, sex, illness, defecation, death. To separate mind and body, as most systems of thought tend to do, seemed to Montaigne an error of the first magnitude. "May Philosophy's followers, faced with breaking their wife's hymen, be no more erect, muscular, nor succulent than her arguments are!" Part of Montaigne's allroundedness has to do with his considering everything about life worth considering:

> It is an error to reckon some functions to be less worthy because they are necessities. They will never beat it out of my head that the marriage of Pleasure to Necessity . . . is a most suitable match.

For Montaigne what was finally of interest were the complexities of morality and the conundrum of human nature. Because he sensed that the universities of his day—as in ours—contributed little to either of these matters, he referred to them as "yap shops" and allowed that if he had a son he would prefer he get along with artisans rather than with scholars. Artificialities came more and more to put Montaigne off; life was too brief to piffle it away on falsities, not least on false learning.

At the beginning of the *Essays* Montaigne is much taken up with the idea of death. One of the early essays carries the title "To Philosophize Is to Learn How to Die"; and later he will write that "dying is without doubt the most noteworthy action in a man's life." But the closer he came to dying himself, the more he was convinced that the great feat was to savor life's pleasures. "It is my conviction that what makes for human happiness is not, as Antithenes said, dying happily but living happily," he writes in "On Repenting." And in "On Experience," the final essay in the book, he observes: "It is an accomplishment, absolute and as it were God-like, to know how to enjoy our being as we ought."

Montaigne's illness—he developed kidney stones in his mid-forties, an illness that killed his father at the age of sixty-seven and would cause his own death at fifty-nine—may have changed his attitudes toward death. He no longer believed, with Seneca, that life was only worthwhile once one could bring oneself to despise it, on the Stoical grounds that nothing is worth having that one fears losing. The "stone," as he sometimes refers to it, gave him anguish and horrendous pain. (Imagine the excruciation of having kidney stones in 1577 and the hideous attempts at cure.) "I am wrestling with the worst of all illnesses," Montaigne writes, "the most unpredictable, the most fatal, and the most uncurable." The stone "unlechered" him, sent him on the road seeking remedies, made him realize afresh the hopelessness of professional knowledge when up against the discordant strength of nature—and, somehow, made him, a man whose full-time task was observing and reporting on himself ("I am loath even to have thoughts that I cannot publish"), even more intelligent.

He reports the pain vividly—talking about "the stubborn nature of my stones, especially when in my prick," in Screech's unbuttoned translation—without quite complaining about it. "Anyone who is afraid of suffering," he writes, "suffers already of being afraid." Perhaps the stone had the contradictory effect of simultaneously reminding him of the sweetness of life and reconciling him to death. Such, at any rate, he leads one to believe when he writes:

> If I had to live again, I would live as I have done; I neither regret the past nor fear the future. And unless I deceive myself, things within have gone much the same as those without. One of my greatest obligations to my lot is that the course of my physical state has brought each thing in due season. I have known the blade, the blossom, and the fruit; and I now know their withering. Happily so, since naturally so. I can bear more patiently the ills that I have since they come in due season, and since they also make me recall with more gratitude the long-lasting happiness of my former life.

The novelist, dramatist, poet has the advantage over the essayist, autobiographer, philosopher of not having his life called into question—at least not decisively so. And even when it is called into question, the imaginative writer is

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freed from his ultimate responsibility for that life's not coming close to matching his art in its pretensions. Think only of Tolstoy, who lived with such clownish complications in his domestic life. Think of Baudelaire, a most unpleasant man generally. It is a great blessing that we do not know more about Shakespeare than we now do, but even if it were revealed that he was, say, a cannibal, we should probably not value the plays much less than we now do. But for the "non-imaginative" writer, the writer who writes not out of his imagination but out of his direct experience, the life is held up next to the work, and quite fairly so. As Montaigne himself puts it: "I never read an author, especially one treating of virtue and duty, without curiously inquiring what sort of man he was."

Montaigne himself passes this test not because of his purity, his goodness, his spirituality, but because of his honesty. He describes himself, and through himself men generally, not as they ought to be but as they are—and the picture seems accurate and just and true. Cosmetics are not employed. "I find that the best of the goodness in me," he writes, "has some vicious stain." And toward the end of the *Essays*, when he begins to write in the first-person plural—*je* becoming *nous*—he notes: "Yet within ourselves we are somehow double creatures, with the result that what we believe we do not believe, what we condemn we cannot rid ourselves of."

Montaigne regularly reports his shortcomings—his want of ambition, his laziness, his ineptitude at managing his estates, his wretched memory, his emotional distance from others. "If others were to look attentively into themselves, as I do, they would find themselves, as I do, full of emptiness and tomfoolery." Yet when he says such things you do not feel the touch of con, of someone working you up to like him for admirably admitting to his weaknesses. No, it is his good sense, his psychological penetration, his general bonhomie that wins one to Montaigne. In him religion never descends into piety, conservatism (he thought change in institutions an opening to tyrants) into meanness, skepticism into nihilism. Above all, he understood that "the world is involved in hundreds of questions where both the for and against are false." Montaigne perhaps alone of men famous in history or literature came closest to living the golden mean:

> Greatness of soul [he writes] consists not so much in striving upward and forward as in knowing how to find one's place and to draw the line. Whatever is adequate it regards as ample; it shows its sublime quality by preferring the moderate to the outstanding. Nothing is so beautiful, so right, as acting as a man should; nor is any learning so arduous as knowing how to live this life naturally and well. And the most uncouth of our afflictions is to despise our being.

A MARK of a great, of a world-historical writer is that his work not only translates across national boundaries but across time. Montaigne has met this mark. Each age has found its different lessons in the *Essays*, from the Enlightenment to our own. In our day, perhaps the most important lesson Montaigne has to teach is the need to regard all systems, all general ideas, all "isms" with extreme and comic dubiety. Montaigne was a writer who loved life, and it is in the name of the love of life, which is only another name for the love of reality, that Montaigne's hardy skepticism makes most sense in our own day, when concepts are created almost hourly and when, as Ortega once remarked, to create a concept is to invite reality to leave the room. Part of the splendor of Montaigne, and part of the pleasure of reading him, is that he is always inviting reality back in.

"*Between you and me*," Montaigne writes, "I have always found two things to be in singular harmony: supercelestial opinions and subterranean morals." What for Montaigne needs to be in harmony are opinions and morals, work and life. What his extraordinary exercise in self-analysis and self-portraiture is in the end about is the disciplining of the moral faculties through rigorous and profound introspection, so that such harmonious order prevails. No artist effectively teaches morality; the best he can hope to do is teach what morality is about. This Montaigne does supremely.

By being a man on whom not much was lost, by studying the complex variousness of human nature through looking first into his own soul, by carefully considering his experience of the world, by not asking the impossible of himself and being suspicious of those who asked it of others, by understanding that man's problem on earth is to attain such wisdom as will help him live a fit and reasonably happy life, Montaigne, for those who read him more than four centuries after he wrote, continues to lessen life's terror and to add to its pleasure. More than this no writer can hope to do, and none has done it better than Michel de Montaigne.

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The Deportations

David Bar-Illan

THE Israeli maxim, "Only Likud can make peace and only Labor can conduct a successful war," had to be amended last December to include, "Only a Leftist coalition can effect a large deportation of Palestinians." For if it is virtually impossible to imagine the enormity of the backlash to a Likud government's taking such a step, it is because under Likud the step itself would simply have been unthinkable. Likud knew that massive deportations would have caused not only an unprecedented international whirlwind but gigantic domestic demonstrations; the Knesset would have been reduced to a battleground, and the media would have branded the government a gang of fascist, "transferist" madmen.

Under Labor, however, the domestic response to the deportation from the administered territories of some 400 leading activists of the Islamic fundamentalist organizations Hamas and Islamic Jihad was a stunning display of unanimity. A poll taken immediately after the expulsion showed over 90 percent of the population supporting the government's action. A few leftist activists and the tiny Peace Now movement were vehemently opposed to the deportations, which only went to show once again how divorced they are from the national consensus. So too with the vast majority of commentators. Their opposition to the expulsion was another indication, if one were needed, that the Israeli media do not represent the Israeli public.

As for Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, his popularity increased, and the leftist Meretz ministers serving under him—people like Shulamit Aloni and Yossi Sarid—were not about to risk losing power by defying him. By mid-January, ten out of eighteen members of his government coalition—including several Labor and all the Meretz ministers—were prepared to compromise and allow the deportees to return. Yet none would say so publicly.

IN TAKING the drastic, unprecedented step of massive expulsion, Rabin was to some extent driven by the psychological syndrome which in the Bush administration's pre-Desert Storm days was called the "wimp factor."

Pressured by the super-doves within his government, Rabin had made various substantive gestures to the Palestinians and the Arab regimes. The most dramatic was the freeze on the building of new homes in Jewish settlements in the administered territories and on Jewish acquisitions in most of the old city of Jerusalem. But these gestures were reciprocated on the Arab side with bolder terrorist activities and greater intransigence at the negotiating table. Even the permission granted Syrian Jews to emigrate, the one concrete achievement of the talks with Syria—attained, incidentally, under Likud—was rescinded.

In addition to being offended by this Arab response, Rabin—a military man whose reputation for security consciousness was what had enabled Labor to win the June elections—grew particularly perturbed by the success of Hamas against Israeli security forces. Within two weeks, six uniformed Israelis, both soldiers and police, were killed (as compared with a total of 26 members of the armed forces killed by Palestinians throughout the *intifada*). This was no longer terrorism against hapless civilians but a challenge to Israel's ability to keep armed soldiers alive. That is why, when a Border Patrol officer named Nissim Toledano was kidnapped and then murdered despite the government's declared willingness to negotiate with the kidnappers, Rabin felt he had to take decisive action.

To his surprise, he encountered no resistance in the "dovecote" which makes up his cabinet. Yet he should not have been surprised. That his Meretz partners were willing to throw their own principles overboard had already been demonstrated by the relentless ardor with which they had been catering to the whims of their coalition partners, the ultra-Orthodox Shas party. And Rabin should have known that as long as the Islamic fundamentalists, who openly oppose negotiating with Israel, could be portrayed as an obstacle to peace, Meretz's fierce opposition to all expulsions would probably give way to its fetishistic attitude toward the peace process.

Furthermore, the Meretz leaders are not merely anti-Hamas; they are pro-PLO. And they were convinced that by exiling Hamas organizers and inciters they were performing a service for the PLO, an organization they believe should be Israel's interlocutor in the peace talks. (When asked in the Knesset what would happen if a Palestinian state were to fall into the hands of Hamas, one Meretz member said: "This won't happen, we'll have a defense pact with the PLO"!)

Indeed, the chairman of the PLO, Yasir Arafat himself, had hinted in an interview with an Italian newspaper a few weeks before the expulsion that he thought Israel should treat Hamas more harshly. After all, Hamas's success in killing Israeli soldiers was mak-

DAVID BAR-ILLAN, *a regular contributor to this department, is the editor of the* Jerusalem Post.

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ing it the hero of the Arab street and challenging the PLO's title as "the sole representative of the Palestinian people."

The Meretz position was buttressed by an intelligence assessment which assured the government that the PLO, while pretending otherwise in its rhetoric, would tacitly applaud the expulsion, and that the peace talks would resume. In fact, Meretz said that the expulsion could serve as a springboard for a leap forward in the peace talks if Israel, after punishing the Hamas "rejectionists," would reward the "moderates" by recognizing the PLO and conducting direct talks with it. To this end Meretz proposed, and by mid-January succeeded in, repealing the law which prohibited unauthorized contacts with PLO officials.

TO CONCLUDE that Hamas was the enemy of peace while the PLO was ardently pursuing it, Israeli doves had to do some tricky intellectual somersaults. True, the two organizations are competitors for Palestinian loyalties and Saudi subsidies, but to draw a line between the "evil" Hamas and the "moderate" PLO is to indulge in sophistry.

The Hamas Islamic covenant—directed more generally at Jews than at Israel—may be worded more offensively than the PLO charter, but the goal of both is the destruction of Israel. Hamas is honest—or unsophisticated—in making this goal known, whereas the PLO, committed to the 1974 "phased plan" for Israel's destruction, has adopted the rhetoric of peace. Even so, the PLO proxy in Jerusalem, Faisal Husseini, speaking in Amman last December, talked of using the stratagem of peace to effect the gradual disintegration of the "Zionist entity." And while it was a flurry of Hamas activity which precipitated the expulsion, the truth is that Fatah, Arafat's own faction within the PLO, still does more killing—both of Jews and of Palestinians—than any other organization.

Nor is Hamas the only "rejectionist" Palestinian organization. There were ten major terrorist groups assembled in Damascus last September to plan the war against the peace negotiations. In addition to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the others included such members in good standing of the PLO as the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Ahmad Jibril group, the Abul Abbas group, and other PLO constituents. Yet Israeli leftists would most surely object to the expulsion of any of *their* leaders from the administered territories.

Nor should the antagonism between Hamas and the "mainstream" PLO be exaggerated. There has always been greater cooperation between them than is generally known. Arafat is himself a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the PLO's pragmatic, secular image is the result mostly of successful public relations. It has been convenient for both organizations to play "good cop/bad cop" for the media.

In expecting tacit PLO approval of the move against Hamas, the Rabin government obviously failed to take into account that extremist actions against Israel are never censured in the Arab world. That Israeli soldiers were being killed by the same kind of fundamentalists who threaten the stability of Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and even Syria and Lebanon, meant absolutely nothing. The Arab press, from Jordan to Algeria to Saudi Arabia, rejoiced in the death of Israelis and unequivocally praised their killers. As the *Mideast Mirror* (December 16, 1992) put it:

> The murder of Israeli Border Policeman Nissim Toledano [was applauded] as a natural and commendable reaction to Israeli occupation and terrorism.

The joy of the Arab world at the killing of Israelis was matched by its outrage at the expulsion of Hamas's organizational infrastructure. The semi-official Egyptian *Al-Ahram* published a cartoon of a large Rabin and a dwarfish Yitzhak Shamir with swastika armbands yelling "Out!" at a multitude of blindfolded Palestinians. Ironically, this was a week after the same paper published an interview with President Hosni Mubarak in which he vowed to crush fundamentalist terrorism. Asked about the death by hanging and the long prison sentences to which a military tribunal in Alexandria had sentenced some of these terrorists, Mubarak answered:

> We referred the case of the extremists to a military tribunal because litigation before civilian courts is slow. We are facing a situation where delay and procrastination are unacceptable. I simply exercised my powers. And this is better than taking illegitimate action.

The Israeli government not only failed to understand the visceral sympathy the killing of Jews evoked in the Arab world; it did not foresee its operational implications. Though nominally supportive of the peace process, the PLO had to prove that it was just as militant as the fundamentalists by promptly convening a "reconciliation" meeting with Hamas in Khartoum, the capital of fundamentalist Sudan. The conclave declared that the two groups would collaborate in intensifying the *intifada*.

YET the Israeli miscalculations did not change the fact that in the war against terrorism, deportation—even for a period not longer than two years, as was originally decreed in this case—is by far the most effective anti-terrorist weapon a democratic society can employ. Detention has proved useless: terrorist leaders and organizers have been able to direct terrorist activities from prison with astonishing efficacy. And the death penalty, even if accepted on moral grounds, would prove counterproductive: it would diminish the incentive of terrorists to surrender and invite kidnappings to effect the release of the convicted. Indeed, the near-paralysis in Hamas activities following the expulsion was palpable proof of the effectiveness of the move. Not until the end of January—a full six weeks later—did one Hamas unit finally manage to stage an operation, ambushing and killing two Israeli soldiers.

Some opposition politicians and

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several observers criticized the way the expulsion was carried out. But given the bad weather—which prevented loading the deportees on helicopters and dispersing them—and the very short notice, designed to prevent intervention by what Rabin termed "so-called human-rights organizations," the army performed well. With hindsight, Rabin admitted that it would have been wiser to wait for the weather to clear and to deposit the deportees in small groups throughout Lebanon.

But here, too, there was a serious miscalculation on the part of the intelligence services. Misled by the Syrian smiles at the Washington talks, the chief of army intelligence—an incorrigible optimist about the possibility of making peace with Syria—failed to foresee the Syrian veto on Lebanon's acceptance of the deportees.

Acutely aware of the propaganda value of having 400 Palestinians stranded on a barren stretch of "no man's land" during the Christmas season (and, conversely, of the difficulty in retaining media interest if they were welcomed by Lebanon), the Syrians prevented their puppet government in Beirut from taking the deportees. When some sick deportees were allowed into a Lebanese hospital, Syria forced Beirut to kick them out and return them to the camp on the freezing hills.

THIS was hardly the first time Arabs have been mistreated by their brethren. Forcing Palestinians to live in camps and exploiting their hardship for propaganda purposes has been Arab policy for 45 years. Nor was the media reaction unexpected. With virtually no exception, the media ignored the reasons for the expulsion and concentrated on pictures of the 400 relegated to "yet another refugee camp" by Israel. None asked why Syria and its puppet regime in Beirut refused to give them shelter.

The condemnation by the UN was also to be expected. To repeat the familiar litany of injustices such habitual condemnations of Israel involve is by now almost tiresome. Neither the UN nor the European Community voiced the slightest disapproval when not 400 but 300,000 Palestinians—the vast majority not terrorists but innocent victims of vindictive revenge—were expelled from Kuwait after the Gulf war. Nor did either body protest the expulsion of Turks from Bulgaria; or the various transfers of ethnic groups in the former USSR; or the forced exodus of millions in Africa.

To Israelis, however, world censure was less important than the knowledge that Arab terrorism had been dealt a serious blow. Three weeks after the deportation, Israel television showed a video film made by Hamas in Gaza. Its hero was Dr. Abdul-Aziz Rantisi, who by then was familiar to viewers of international news networks as the spokesman of the deportees in Lebanon. But in the film, Rantisi displayed neither the reasonable manner nor the pious tone seen and heard by millions watching the deportees' travails. Railing to a Gaza mob with the virulent passion of a fanatic demagogue, he called for death: the death of Israel, the death of Jews, and even the death by martyrdom of his own disciples in the *jihad* against the infidels. Uniformed armed men, marching, singing, shouting, and calling for Israel's destruction, served as a counterpoint.

Clearly, the precipitous return of Rantisi and his followers, as demanded by the UN, would pass a death sentence on an untold number of Israelis and Palestinians.

Fortunately, no such outcome was prescribed by the compromise reached in early February between Rabin and Secretary of State Warren Christopher (a deal that was struck in order to lessen international pressure and to avert the need for a U.S. veto of a possible Security Council resolution imposing sanctions on Israel). If this compromise were accepted by the Palestinians, the worst offenders among the 400 deportees would remain in exile for at least another year (instead of two), even though 100 of the lesser ones would be returned immediately. In general, then, the impact of the expulsion was weakened, but not destroyed, by the Rabin-Christopher deal.

DESPITE the overwhelming support in Israel for the deportation, the unanimous international insistence that it represented a breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, to which Israel is a signatory, made many Israelis uneasy. That the exclusive application of the convention to Israel was yet another odious display of the double standard did not ameliorate this feeling.

The Fourth Geneva Convention stipulates that

> Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited.

Yet as many eminent authorities on international law—including the late Julius Stone, Eugene V. Rostow, and Yehuda Blum—have pointed out, the Convention simply does not apply here.

Thus, Professor Blum, who served as Israel's ambassador to the UN, has shown that deportation conforms both to domestic and international law. In all the administered territories, Regulation 112 of the Defense (Emergency) Regulations of 1945, enacted at the time by the British Mandatory Power and providing for the possibility of expulsions, is still the law in force. Both the Hague Regulation of 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention oblige the occupying power to respect the law in force in the occupied territory. "Consequently," says Blum,

> in expelling certain individuals from Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, Israel is in fact applying the law in force in these territories.

And indeed, in late January, the Israeli Supreme Court (whose integrity has never been questioned by anyone and which has often ruled against the government) upheld the deportations as legal.

But quite apart from any legal technicalities, there is the unanswerable argument advanced by Professor Stone in 1969:

> It seems reasonable to limit the sweeping literal words of Article 49 [of the Fourth Geneva Con-

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vention] to situations at least remotely similar to those contemplated by the draftsmen, namely the Nazi World War II practices of large-scale transfers of populations, whether by mass transfer or transfer of many individuals, to more hostile or dangerous environments, for torture, extermination, or slave labor. Israel's policy of selective expulsion of a relatively small number of individuals involved in acts of violence and terrorism certainly cannot be likened, even by the widest stretch of the imagination, to the Nazi deportation practices of World War II.

IT IS not easy for democracies to fight wars. Free societies have built-in vulnerabilities which war—an intrinsically undemocratic effort—exposes and accentuates. This is particularly true when the war is not an all-out military confrontation but an undeclared, "low-intensity" campaign of terrorism. Democracies, dedicated to human rights and due process, have yet to find an effective response to this scourge.

Israel probably has more experience in fighting terrorism than any other country. Yet like all democracies, Israel has found it easier to take drastic measures when confronted with a regular army than to curb freedoms in the war against terror gangs. But sometimes Israel has no choice. Israel is not Spain fighting the national aspirations of the Basques; it is not Britain battling the IRA; it is not France of the 1960's suppressing a national uprising in an overseas colony. Israel is fighting for survival.

The fact that the most massive expulsion in Israel's history has been ordered by the most dovish government in its history indicates that even the most dogmatic political philosophy must defer to reality. It has also taught Israelis, and perhaps others, that it was not former Prime Minister Shamir's "intransigence" and hard-line policies which were the obstacles to peace, but the relentless Arab war against Israel's existence.

The world's censure of the deportations reminded many of the international response to Israel's bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981. It took nine years for others to recognize that bombing as a prescient contribution to world peace. The action against Hamas is not unlike that raid, for Islamic fundamentalism constitutes the greatest incipient danger in the world today. Israel may be a prime target of Islamic fundamentalism, but it is not the only one. The new fanaticism, soon to be equipped with nuclear weapons, threatens the stability of virtually every country from North Africa to Indonesia. It is to this danger, rather than to condemning Israel for combating terrorism, that the world should now be addressing itself.

Music

Furtwängler and the Nazis

Samuel Lipman

THE controversy surrounding the career of the German conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler (1886-1954) refuses to die. Just this past year, a detailed and fascinating biography by the writer and film-maker Sam H. Shirakawa appeared in this country, and the year before saw the publication in England of a collection of Furtwängler's more important writings and speeches, edited by the Germanic scholar Ronald Taylor, as well as an English translation of the historian Fred K. Prieberg's massive 1986 chronicle of the relations between Furtwängler and the Nazis. In 1990, a quasi-official biography came out, written by the conductor and musicologist Hans-Hubert Schönzeler with the help of the Furtwängler family; in the previous year there was a translation of an abridgment of Furtwängler's musico-philosophical notebooks.

And these are only the most recent books: among the older publications of importance about Furtwängler are the gossipy yet discreet memoirs of his long-time secretary, Berta Geissmar, which originally appeared in London in 1944; and two editions, the first brought out in 1970, of an invaluable discography of Furtwängler's recorded performances by Henning Smidth Olsen. The conductor's own obviously staged but revealing 1938 "conversations" about music were published in English in 1953. Mention too must be made here of Prieberg's important 1982 history

SAMUEL LIPMAN *is* COMMENTARY*'s music critic and the publisher of the* New Criterion. *His most recent book is* Music and More: Essays, 1975-1991 *(Northwestern University Press).*

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in German of music under Hitler, unfortunately never translated into English.*

Aside from the discography and Furtwängler's writings about music, the books I have listed deal not with art but with the politics, great and petty, of the second quarter of the century. A vanishingly small part of the Furtwängler controversy is musical; even his artistic detractors, who frequently turn out to be fans of his great rival and polar opposite Arturo Toscanini (1867-1957), recognize Furtwängler's powerful personality and his almost unparalleled ability to bend an orchestra—and the public—to his will.

Indeed, I am tempted to say that the Furtwängler controversy is not about music at all. It is not about his hyper-romantic performances, or about his almost total rejection of the music written after World War I. The controversy instead is about Furtwängler the man, or, to put it more precisely, Furtwängler the citizen. For just as he has won undying fame through his many recorded performances, so has he won undying notoriety as the most famous, and by all odds the most important, performer to remain in Germany, working and seemingly thriving, under Adolf Hitler.

IT IS worthwhile to look for a moment at the situation of music just before and after Hitler came to power. The 1920's had been a silver age of music in Weimar Germany. While one can hardly pretend that musical composition was then in the sublimely flourishing state in which it had been during so much of the 19th century, nevertheless the work of Arnold Schoenberg, Paul Hindemith, Kurt Weill, Hans Pfitzner, and of course the still-productive Richard Strauss seemed important and perhaps even of lasting value. To this day there is still interest, fitful but real, in Weimar composition.

Be that as it may, however, the strength of musical life in Weimar Germany was not in composition, it was in performance, or, more precisely, in performers.

Some of these performers were instrumentalists and vocalists: one thinks immediately of the pianists Artur Schnabel and Edwin Fischer, of the violinists Carl Flesch and Adolf Busch, of the cellist Emanuel Feuermann, of such great singers as Friedrich Schorr, Frida Leider, Maria Ivogün, and (shared with Vienna) Lotte Lehmann, Elisabeth Schumann, and Richard Mayr. But even more than in instrumentalists and vocalists, the strength of German music in the 1920's lay in conductors. To mention merely the most famous names—Furtwängler, Karl Muck, Bruno Walter, Fritz Busch, Erich Kleiber, Otto Klemperer, and George Szell—is to name a substantial percentage of the greatest conductors in history. It is also to ignore such lesser names as Hans Knappertsbusch, Robert Heger, Leo Blech, Karl Elmendorff, Hans Rosbaud, Artur Rother, William Steinberg, Jascha Horenstein, Fritz Zweig, and Fritz Stiedry, all of whom would today be superstars on the international circuit. Taken together, these musicians made up the most remarkable array of conductors ever to have been active in one place at one time.

When Hitler seized power in 1933, the musical scene in Germany was quick to change. The Jewish instrumentalists and singers quickly left. Before many months had passed, the conductors followed. Walter, Klemperer, Szell, Steinberg, Horenstein, Zweig, and Stiedry, all Jews, either left voluntarily or were bullied into leaving; the non-Jews Kleiber and Fritz Busch left on principle. Muck retired in 1933, but Knappertsbusch and Heger and all the other innumerable highly-qualified *Kapellmeisters*, joined by the distinguished Austrians Karl Böhm and Clemens Krauss, stayed behind to keep the level of German music-making high. Curiously, the Jewish Leo Blech, a noted opera conductor, was protected for several years—it is said by Reich Marshal Hermann Goering—and then spirited out to Riga and later to Sweden; Blech was alleged to be the subject of Goering's well-known remark (when he was attacked for being insufficiently anti-Semitic), "*Wer Jude ist, bestimme ich!*" (Who is a Jew, I determine!).

Fine musicians as they were, none of the conductors who stayed behind in Nazi Germany was in the class of Furtwängler, either as a celebrity or as a musical force. It is the fact of *his* staying behind that has produced the Furtwängler "problem"—the problem not simply of a musician but rather of an avatar of German culture. To understand why this should be so, we must begin by noting briefly, through a sketch of his life, just how completely he was the very embodiment of German *Bildung* (cultural formation) and the primacy of music, the *beau idéal* of the cultivated German intellectual and artist.

WILHELM FURTWÄNGLER was the son of the great classical archeologist Adolf Furtwängler, an early figure in the development of Greek studies in Germany, director of the Museum of Antiquities in Berlin until 1894, and thereafter professor of archeology at the University of Munich. His mother was a painter; her father, according to Shirakawa, had been a friend of Brahms. The young Furtwängler was educated privately; his tutors, apparently while he was still in his early teens, were the archeologist Ludwig Curtius, the sculptor Adolf Hildebrand, and the art historian and musicologist Walter Riezler. In his youth he traveled in Italy and Greece and read extensively in both the ancient Greeks and in Shakespeare.

For a time he wanted to be, like his father, an archeologist. But

* Sam H. Shirakawa, *The Devil's Music Master: The Controversial Life and Career of Wilhelm Furtwängler*, Oxford, 506 pp., $35.00; Ronald Taylor (ed. and trans.), *Furtwängler on Music: Essays and Addresses*, Scolar Press (1991); Fred K. Prieberg, *Trial of Strength: Wilhelm Furtwängler and the Third Reich* (Christopher Dolan, trans.), Quartet Books (1991); Hans-Hubert Schönzeler, *Furtwängler*, Duckworth (1990); Wilhelm Furtwängler, *Notebooks 1924-1954*, Michael Tanner (ed.) and Shaun Whiteside (trans.), Quartet (1990); Berta Geissmar, *The Baton and the Jackboot*, Hamish Hamilton (1944), reprinted by Da Capo Press (1975, under the title *Two Worlds of Music*)—the fuller German-language edition of this book was published in Zurich in 1946 under the title *Musik im Schatten der Politik*; Wilhelm Furtwängler, *Concerning Music* (L.J. Lawrence, trans.), Boosey & Hawkes (1953); Fred K. Prieberg, *Musik im NS-Staat*, Fischer (1982).

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music called: as a tiny child, he began to study the piano, and soon he was composing as well, working with the then-well-known composers Joseph Rheinberger and Max von Schillings. It seems to have been the study of the late quartets of Beethoven, while Furtwängler was still in his mid-teens, that turned his thoughts away not just from archeology but from musical composition and toward performance.

In 1906, at the age of twenty, he conducted his first concert, a program with the Kaim Orchestra in Munich that included the Bruckner Symphony no. 9, the Beethoven *Consecration of the House* Overture, and his own Largo in B-minor. By 1905, he had already become a rehearsal pianist at the City Theater in Breslau; in 1906, he became an assistant conductor at the Zurich Opera House. After 1907, he spent two years at the Munich Court Opera under the eminent Wagnerian Felix Mottl, and then became third conductor in Strasbourg, where the composer Pfitzner was music director. At the age of twenty-five, he became director of the Lübeck Opera and conductor of the orchestra's subscription series. He then went to the Mannheim Opera, spending a period there variously described as five years (1915-20) and three years (1915-18). In Mannheim, he conducted such heavyweights of the operatic repertory as Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Weber's *Der Freischütz*, and Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and the *Ring*.

The pace of his rise was quickening. In 1917, he first conducted the Berlin Philharmonic, and returned as a guest several times the next year. In 1919, he began to appear regularly with what later became the Vienna *Tonkünstler* Orchestra and is now the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. In 1920 he replaced Willem Mengelberg at the Frankfurt Museum concerts and Richard Strauss at the concerts of the Berlin State Opera. Finally, in 1922, he succeeded the legendary Arthur Nikisch as conductor of both the Leipzig *Gewandhaus* Orchestra and the Berlin Philharmonic; in the same year he began his lifelong association with the Vienna Philharmonic. In 1924 he started conducting in London, and from 1925 to 1927 was a very successful guest conductor with the New York Philharmonic. His New York appearances, though enthusiastically received by the public and (initially) by the press, failed to produce an invitation to become the leader of the orchestra. Furtwängler's invincible competition was Toscanini, and in this battle he was hindered, as has often been noted, by his unwillingness to spend time fulfilling the numerous social duties required by board and patrons.

In the 1930's Furtwängler began touring widely in Europe with the Berlin Philharmonic, visiting London and Paris on a regular basis. With Toscanini securely ensconced in New York, Furtwängler, not yet fifty, was now undoubtedly the leading conductor on the Continent. Like most cultivated Germans, Furtwängler was hardly interested in politics; one of the major tragedies of German history has been the tendency of German *Dichter und Denker* (poets and thinkers) to look at politics as a dirty affair of power, conducted by street-types in back rooms. Yet Weimar had been an intensely political time, full of recurrent crises and struggles, with economic life affected both by hyperinflation and, latterly, depression.

Then there were the Nazis. By January 30, 1933, when Adolf Hitler came to power, politics could no longer be ignored even by the supremely cultured Furtwängler. It seems plain from all the printed material now available that Furtwängler's quarrels with the Nazis—and he had many of them—had nothing to do with economic policy, rearmament, or the place of Germany in the world; there is no doubt that Furtwängler was something of a German nationalist. There was only one thing that this great conductor would truly fight for: his ability to make music, unimpeded by outside pressures.

And so Furtwängler ran headlong into Hitler and his fellow thugs. The cornerstone of Hitler's ideology and praxis was anti-Semitism: Jews were to be eliminated, in ever more brutal ways, from any participation in German life. But Furtwängler saw matters differently. It was not that he liked Jews, though we have no evidence that he disliked them, either. Regardless of his personal preferences, however, Jews were important, and perhaps even vital, in German musical life.

Above all, they played, and played well, in Furtwängler's orchestras. In the Berlin Philharmonic alone, for example, his concertmaster was the twenty-three-year-old Szymon Goldberg, and his two principal cellists were Nikolai Graudan and Joseph Schuster. Furtwängler had no intention of giving up some of his favorite players, and his response to the demand that he do so—via an open letter, dated April 12, 1933, to the infamous Dr. Joseph Goebbels—was swift if in a sense carefully circumscribed.

After mentioning his ties to Germany, Furtwängler alludes in this letter to

> certain events which have recently taken place in the musical life of our country and which, in my view, have no necessary connection with the restoration of our national honor, which we all welcome with great joy and gratitude.

He then remarks that the "political conduct" of the Jews now affected "has not given any ground for complaint," and goes on to defend *his* musicians, though hardly to attack all anti-Semitism:

> If the campaign against the Jews is directed principally against those rootless and sterile performers who are out to impress through *Kitsch*, empty virtuosity, and the like, then it is entirely justified. One cannot be too rigorous in one's opposition to such people and the spirit they represent—a spirit, incidentally, which is by no means confined to them. . . . But if this campaign is aimed against genuine artists, it is against the interests of our cultural life. . . . It must therefore be firmly stated that men like Bruno Walter, Klemperer, . . . and others must be allowed to continue to express themselves through their art.

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The words must have seemed disloyal, but the Nazis were unwilling to give up their investment in the world-famous cultural property that Furtwängler represented. In July 1933, Goering appointed him a Prussian *Staatsrat* (state councillor); the duties were evanescent, but the honor—or, in the eyes of the outside world, the dishonor—was to dog Furtwängler for the rest of his life.

THEN, toward the end of 1933, Goebbels set up the *Reichsmusikkammer* (National Chamber of Music) to integrate all of German musical life under his control. Richard Strauss was made president, and Furtwängler vice president. Again the duties were trifling, and the international odium great. Strauss was forced to resign in 1935 after the Gestapo had intercepted an incriminating letter he wrote to his Jewish librettist, Stefan Zweig, attacking Nazi anti-Semitism. And as for Furtwängler, his foray into Nazi cultural politics did not last even quite so long.

He came a cropper over his defense not of a Jew but of the racially pure composer Paul Hindemith. For it was not just Jewish musicians who bore the brunt of the Nazi onslaught: "Aryan" composers who defied the Nazi strictures against modern-sounding music were also anathematized. Hindemith's crime (aside from the fact that his wife was half-Jewish and her brother-in-law completely so) seems to have been several mocking operatic pieces written in the avant-garde and iconoclastic mood of Weimar culture.

In 1933, Hindemith had started to work on *Mathis der Maler* ("Matthias the Painter"), an opera about the creator of the famous Isenheim Altar; the libretto, Hindemith's own, expressed sympathy both for Luther and for the Peasants' War (1524-26). Before completing the opera, Hindemith extracted a symphony from it for Furtwängler's performance in March 1934. Though the premiere was successful, the Nazis began a virulent mobilization against Hindemith. In November of the same year Furtwängler wrote an open letter, published in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, defending the composer.

The defense was carefully crafted so as not to include the objectionable products of Hindemith's Weimar youth. Instead, Furtwängler praises him for his school music, music which,

> tirelessly seeking ways of bridging the deplorable gulf that has opened up between folk music and art music, . . . coincides with trends characteristic of our new National-Socialist Germany.

But the main purpose of Furtwängler's intervention was to support *Mathis der Maler*, a work of "profound . . . moral commitment" written by a composer "who has pure Germanic blood in his veins" and is "an out-and-out German type—German in his direct and honest craftsmanship and his open, rugged nature." Furtwängler ended by rejecting political denunciation as applied to art, and by saying that in a time of paucity of talent, "we cannot afford to turn our backs like this on a man of the caliber of Hindemith."

Furtwängler's advocacy of Hindemith was to no avail. In fact his article caused a furor, immediately provoking a speech by Goebbels and an article by the racial ideologist Alfred Rosenberg in the Nazi organ, the *Völkischer Beobachter* ("The People's Observer"). Hindemith immediately began to consider emigration, which, after several long visits out of Germany, he finally accomplished in 1937. More immediately, Furtwängler was now publicly broken. Under great pressure, he resigned from all his official posts; Goering accepted all the resignations save that of *Staatsrat*.

From this time till the end of the war, Furtwängler, the most important musician left in Germany (after the by now very old Richard Strauss), would function entirely as a musical free-lancer. In 1936, Toscanini suggested that Furtwängler succeed him at the New York Philharmonic, but despite Furtwängler's record of public if only partial opposition to the Nazis, public opinion in New York compelled the withdrawal of an offer that had already been made. At home, though he remained famous, his position was hardly secure, even musically. Goering put much effort into backing the then-young Herbert von Karajan (who joined the Nazi party not once but, it appears, twice) as a rival to Furtwängler. This effort succeeded only too well when the most prestigious review of Karajan's 1938 performance of *Tristan und Isolde* at the Berlin *Staatsoper* was headlined *Das Wunder Karajans* ("The Karajan Miracle").

IN THE years until 1945 that were left to Hitler and the Nazis, Furtwängler embarked on a life of innumerable small compromises, as they must have seemed to him. He conducted concerts with Nazis and even on occasion Hitler in the audience. By carrying his baton in his right hand, he seems to have avoided giving the Hitler salute (the so-called "German Greeting") at concerts; but once, caught by surprise, he did shake hands with Hitler from the podium at the conclusion of the Beethoven Ninth Symphony. He conducted *Die Meistersinger* in both 1943 and 1944 at Bayreuth. He gave lunchtime concerts at arms factories, and he took the Berlin Philharmonic abroad on tours of neutral countries, though in general—but not invariably—he avoided giving concerts in occupied countries.

Even after his disastrous defeat over the Hindemith matter, there was a side other than capitulation to Furtwängler's behavior. He labored ceaselessly—the evidence on this point is overwhelming—to help Jewish musicians leave Germany, to write letters on their behalf to prospective foreign employers, and to make their lot somewhat easier when they could not escape. On this issue, Prieberg is definitive, listing the names of some 109 individuals who "were in racial or political difficulties" and who received Furtwängler's help.*

Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS, was a dedicated enemy, and begged Hitler (according to Schön-

* On this list is Furtwängler's secretary Berta Geissmar, for whom he found congenial employment in London with the conductor Sir Thomas Beecham.

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zeler) for permission to send the conductor to a concentration camp. But Hitler and Goebbels, no doubt because of their awareness of Furtwängler's prestige both inside and outside Germany, always blocked the move. After the war, a memo was found in the files of the Ministry of Propaganda, saying, "There is no Jew, filthy as he may be, for whom Furtwängler does not stretch a helping hand." When, in early 1945, Himmler seemed to be catching up with Furtwängler, another top Nazi, Albert Speer, hinted to the conductor that he should leave immediately for Switzerland. This Furtwängler did, and he was to live there until his death in 1954.

AT THE end of the war, Furtwängler was a marked man, subject to a long, drawn-out de-Nazification trial by which he was eventually cleared. In his private writings he both blamed Hitler and the Nazis for their crimes and castigated the Allies for attempting to impose the notion of collective guilt on the German people. He was convinced that the true German resistance to Hitler could only have been undertaken by those who, like him, had stayed rather than emigrated.

With the aid of (among others) the great Jewish violinist Yehudi Menuhin, he resumed performing in Europe in 1947, but when he was engaged to conduct the Chicago Symphony in 1949, American public opinion forced the cancellation of the offer. In 1951, the general manager of the Metropolitan Opera, Rudolph Bing (according to Shirakawa), invited Furtwängler to take a leading role there, but once again public opinion foreclosed the issue. In Europe, however, Furtwängler—despite Karajan, of whom he was unrestrainedly envious—reigned supreme.

Since his death, his reputation has continued to soar, sustained by the preservation and continuing availability (now on CD) of a huge number of his broadcast performances dating from the war years and continuing till the very end. Even after due allowance has been made for Karajan and Leonard Bernstein, he remains, with Toscanini, one of the two great conductorial heroes of our musical epoch.

THUS we can take Furtwängler's musical stature for granted. His commercial recordings of Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner still set the standard; the innumerable pirated broadcast recordings only add to our impression of his greatness. But as I remarked at the outset, the Furtwängler issue is not musical. It is political, it is cultural, and it is human.

Just because Furtwängler was a great musician, and just because he wrote a great deal about what might be called the philosophical aspects of music and its performance, we should not be fooled into believing that he was a great thinker. His writings, though sometimes containing deeply felt and even moving insights, are dense and woolly in their Germanic opacity. But—and the but is of the highest importance—they all testify to the fact that for Furtwängler music was not just an ideal (rather than a craft) but *the* ideal of his life, of his age, of his nation, and of the world.

The passages in his writings where he takes this position are numerous, but two are especially noteworthy:

> Art cannot be placed at the *service* of public life. It must be left as it is, its materials are the great primal forces: religious content, the fatherland, love. Where these do not somehow show through, no art can develop. To look the facts in the face: if one wants art, one must leave it the way it is. In art, content is always taken for granted as natural. If this content is a part of the age, art will deal with it [*Notebooks*, 1933].
>
> The feeling of being able to form things organically—that is, as nature itself does—outweighs everything else by far. Failure, lifelong misunderstanding and exclusion, the bitterest thing: separation from people, it provides a replacement for all that. It provides ineffable independence from the age, ineffable peace in nature and in God. Of course, since Brahms, nobody has carried this out in music, only a few did before. This is my aim, an aim that is surely worth a few sacrifices [*Notebooks*, 1942].

Well, then, what was art, even the greatest art, to do when it came face to face with Hitler? Bruno Walter, a mild-mannered man and once Furtwängler's friend, wrote to him (as quoted by Shirakawa) in 1949 in answer to a plea for help:

> Please consider thus: throughout the years [of the Nazi regime] your art was used as a conspicuously effective means of propaganda for the regime of the Devil, that you performed high service to this regime through your prominent image and great talent, that the presence and performance of an artist of your stature abetted every horrible crime against culture and morality, or at least, gave considerable support to them. Consider too that you ultimately have lived for twelve years in the Nazi empire without terror, or fear of it, of what was happening there, and you were never forced into extremity, and that you carried your title and positions during this time. In light of all this, of what significance is your assistance in the isolated cases of a few Jews?

Walter could not have put the question more clearly: did a great artist, no matter how he tried to help individuals, have the moral right to stay when his staying could be taken as a badge of honor by an immoral regime? And Walter's answer too was clear: no.

ONE may grieve that Furtwängler's noble view of music, so necessary to the creation of art, accords so ill with the reality of our heedless, cruel, evil world. There can be little doubt that Furtwängler's own immense dedication to music was what made it possible for him to qualify even his strongest utterances against the Nazis with remarks tending to give the impression only that Hitler had got hold of the "wrong" Jews. In Furtwängler's defense, however, it must be said that his attempts to help Jewish musicians, despite Walter's easy dismissal of them and his suggestion that Furtwängler was himself

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never in danger, were courageous, and perhaps sometimes even foolhardy. Yet there can also be no doubt that Furtwängler's staying *did* help Hitler and the Nazis by spreading the illusion that the world of *Kultur* continued to exist under the Third Reich.

Justice requires us to acknowledge here that the moral dilemmas of artists and intellectuals—indeed, of all citizens—in Nazi Germany were not all that different from the problems caused by the realities of existence in Bolshevik Russia. Among the great Russian artists, did not Prokofiev and Shostakovich (despite the evidence of the latter's private resistance), Oistrakh and Gilels, Ulanova and Plisetskaya, legitimize Stalin & Co. by continuing to compose and perform, by continuing through their every public action to pay tribute to the tyrant? (The same problems of cooperation and collaboration existed in Eastern Europe, too, and of course still exist in China.)

True, it would have been a great deal easier for Furtwängler, with his numerous foreign travels, to have left Germany than for Soviet artists to have left the Soviet Union during the period of high Stalinism. But did these Soviet artists really need to allow their work to be used as evidence that Russian *Kultur* continued to exist under Bolshevism? On the other hand, were Sergei Rachmaninov, secure in America and Switzerland, or Thomas Mann, secure in Pacific Palisades, or Toscanini, secure in Riverdale, more moral than someone who actually saved a few Jews in Nazi Germany, or tried to help a few political prisoners in Soviet Russia? And in any case, how harsh can *we* be, from our comfortable perches in the West, in passing judgment on those who were daily (*pace* Bruno Walter) faced with the possibility of internment and death?

I have no answer to the great civic questions raised by the behavior of Furtwängler or the other artists I have named. Splendid artists all, they compromised their civic virtue in order to accomplish their art. Those who remained were compromised by their remaining, and those who left were compromised by their leaving. What resistance they offered as human beings to the evil around them must be credited to them; in no case of which I know can it be said that physical survival with full honor was possible under the worst forms of totalitarianism, for the very act of surviving was itself a compromise with evil. The ultimate triumph of totalitarianism, I suppose it can be said, is that under its sway only a martyred death can be truly moral.

Observations

American Stories

Evelyn Toynton

THE poet-critic Randall Jarrell once defined the novel as "a prose narrative of a certain length that has something wrong with it." The short story might be said to differ from the novel in that there need not be anything wrong with it—perfection, of however narrow a kind, being attainable in the shorter form that is inconceivable in the long. It was probably this that William Faulkner had in mind when he said he turned to writing novels because poetry was too hard and short stories only slightly easier.

Faulkner's positioning of the short story seems relevant to more than the degree of difficulty involved. The best short fiction presents us with a distillation of internal experience in something of the way that poetry does; less allusive, more grounded in the details of individual lives, it nevertheless tends to center on an epiphany, a moment of intense illumination, that is recognizably poetic in nature.

Perhaps because of its quasi-kinship with poetry, through much of its history the short story has tended to attract a certain kind of temperament—melancholy, lyrical, elegiac. Among those who have done their best work in the form, one thinks of Chekhov in Russia and Katherine Mansfield in England; or, in this country, of F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Cheever. Even for "heavier" writers, whose fame rests largely on their novels, working in the shorter form often seems to heighten their virtues without allowing scope

EVELYN TOYNTON *has published reviews in the* New York Times, *the* American Scholar, *and elsewhere.*

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for their faults; if Henry James is a perfect example, so too is his literary opposite, Ernest Hemingway.

But none of these observations may be pertinent to the short story as it is conceived of now. Since the late 60's, there has been a much-vaunted renaissance of the form, in America in particular; indeed, certain critics have theorized—not always disapprovingly—that the short story is ideally suited to a generation weaned on television, and therefore unlikely to have a long attention span. A new breed of "minimalist" story has emerged: flat, laconic, often littered with brand names and descriptions of junk food, it is said to reflect the lack of inwardness, the obsessive consumerism, of the contemporary world. The characters in such fiction, though rarely happy, never suffer very passionately, since passion of course requires inwardness. Instead of wild sorrow or grief or even melancholy, they seem doomed to chronic low-grade depression, a life of permanent Excedrin headaches.

While the minimalist story has gained prominence, there has also been a shift in academic attitudes toward the stories of the past. New critical approaches, most of them more or less sociopolitical in orientation, have redirected attention to stories as critiques of society in a way that used rarely to be the case. The idea of the well-crafted, shapely story; the poetic story; the highly charged story of personal revelation has fallen out of favor in the classroom. Suddenly, these rather fragile artifacts are expected to bear some quite heavy freight.

Now we have two new anthologies of American short stories, both of which, although edited by accomplished practitioners of the form, wind up seeming less like reflections of their personal tastes than indicia of prevailing literary trends.* Indeed, in the case of *The Oxford Book of American Short Stories*, which covers 200 years of American short fiction, Joyce Carol Oates explicitly tells us that she made her selections on the basis of something other than mere individual preference, explaining in her introduction that she

> thought it important to present outstanding titles by writers representing a broad spectrum of cultural traditions. . . . I have sought to include more women writers than commonly appear in such volumes . . . my emphasis is on storytelling . . . with a political and/or social theme.

So: a multiculturalist anthology of the American short story, steeped in political correctness. But at least Oates has found a number of stories that serve to vindicate her agenda; however much we may resist the rhetoric of victimology, there have indeed been ethnic writers who deserve a wider audience. Take, for example, Charles Chesnutt—"generally considered," says Oates, "the first black writer to find a white readership in America." In "The Sheriff's Children" (1899), Chesnutt writes about a small-town lawman in the post-Civil-War South confronting a desperate black prisoner who turns out to be his son by a former slave. The tormented emotions of both men are conveyed with such unsentimental precision and eloquence that we can only regret that Chesnutt's "literary career, by his own decision, was short-lived." (One wishes Oates had told us what caused him to reach that decision.)

Similarly, Zora Neale Hurston's "Sweat" (1926), about a black washerwoman's suffering at the hands of her philandering husband, is as scrupulously observed, with the same lack of sentimentalism. And then there is Ralph Ellison's horrifying "Blood Royale," which, in slightly altered form, became the first section of his novel, *Invisible Man* (1952), and which can still make one cringe in shame for the white race.

These stories remind us that, before anyone was preaching multiculturalism, we always knew that literature had the power to make vivid to us people we might never meet in life—whether a mad Russian civil servant or the child of a slave and her master; to personalize the "political and/or social" by making us feel and believe in one individual's suffering.

But too many stories Oates presumably chose for their sociopolitical themes or for the genetic composition of their authors fail to serve that function very effectively. "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1899) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, ensconced by now in the feminist canon, might be described as a breathless 19th-century *Diary of a Mad Housewife*; the narrator's affected, portentous tone finally seems more irritating than stirring. "The Ghost in the Mill" (1872) by Harriet Beecher Stowe, which even Oates admits is "quaint by contemporary standards, and hardly adult fare," goes a long way toward refuting the claims for Stowe's place in the literary pantheon. Langston Hughes's "Red-Headed Baby" (1934) is lame and labored and totally predictable from the first page. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's hokey "Old Woman Magoun" (1891) is pure soap opera.

In her introduction, Oates writes that another of her chief aims was to avoid standard anthology pieces; instead, she sought out

> virtually unknown yet fascinating works by certain of our classic American writers . . . that, while reflecting these authors' characteristic styles, visions, and subjects, suggested other aspects of sensibility.

This sounds like an admirable idea, and such writers as Sherwood Anderson, Flannery O'Connor, Edith Wharton, and Henry James are indeed represented here by lesser-known stories that give the flavor of these authors' best work. But in the case of Herman Melville, for example, what we get instead of the much-anthologized but indestructibly wonderful "Bartleby the Scrivener" is a virtual tract about ruling-class smugness and the unfair treatment of women, while Fitzgerald's "An Alcoholic Case" (1937), a bleak and enervated portrait of a man drink-

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* *The Oxford Book of American Short Stories*, edited by Joyce Carol Oates. Oxford University Press, 768 pp., $25.00. *The Granta Book of the American Short Story*, edited by Richard Ford. Granta Books/Viking Penguin, 710 pp., $27.50.

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ing himself to death, seems totally *un*characteristic of his "style, vision, and subjects." One can only imagine that Oates preferred it to his more fanciful writings because of the "seriousness" of its message. Since these stories give us but a dim sense of their authors' gifts, it is hard to imagine anyone unfamiliar with their other works rushing to seek them out on the basis of what he finds here.

IT IS when we arrive at the contemporary section, however, that the limitations of Oates's criteria become most evident. Consider the last seven authors included here: John Edgar Wideman, a black; the Calcutta-born Bharati Mukherjee; the Chinese-American Amy Tan; the part-Native-American Louise Erdrich; David Leavitt, who has made a career out of being a homosexual writer; Sandra Cisneros, a Mexican-American; and Pinckney Benedict, who might be designated a hillbilly writer—at least Oates is at some pains to tell us that he "was born and continues to live on his family's dairy farm north of Lewisburg, West Virginia."

Except for Mukherjee's, none of these stories possesses any great literary interest, though Erdrich's and Tan's rise somewhat above the tedium of the others. Cisneros, described by Oates as having a "gift for the luminous image, the revelatory phrase," seems barely literate. Here is one of her stories in its entirety:

A House of My Own

> Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed. Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up after.
>
> Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem.

This sounds like nothing so much as the journal entry of a sensitive adolescent—the sort of thing an English teacher would be delighted to receive from an eighth-grader. But its solemn banalities, its awkward alliterations, its juvenile straining after poetic effect hardly warrant it a place beside Henry James.

It seems ironic that Cisneros is a graduate of the prestigious Iowa Writers' Workshop. So, too, is Benedict, who writes in backwoods English:

> Hunter's up on the porch, strippen away at a chunk of soft pine wood with his Kaybar knife, and I'm setten out in the yard to get away from the sound, chip chip chip like some damn squirrel.

Benedict also has a B.A. in English from Princeton (where Oates teaches), so his are not the naive outpourings of some diamond-in-the-rough yokel; this is highly self-conscious primitivism. In fact, one is tempted to conclude that self-consciousness is destroying ethnic writing today as it has destroyed many another literary movement in the past. Zora Neale Hurston wrote about blacks because they were the people she knew best; Cisneros and Benedict seem to be parading their deprived backgrounds to earn themselves a place among the righteous. There are better young ethnic writers than these—the black writer Edward P. Jones, for example—but, since they make no point of serving up victims, perhaps they do not serve Oates's purposes so well.

What seems most notably absent from this anthology—a lack that may be due not just to Oates's political stance but also to some temperamental distrust of a certain kind of artistry—are any truly elegant stories, those that afford what Vladimir Nabokov called

> aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm.

There is, for example, nothing here by Shirley Hazzard, by William Maxwell, or even by Truman Capote, who sometimes attained to that standard, too. With few exceptions—Cheever's lyrical riffs in "The Death of Justina" (1960) chief among them—the stories here are decidedly pedestrian, distinguished more by earnestness of intent than by any imaginative grace.

BUT if grace is in short supply in Oates's anthology, it is almost wholly absent (in the spiritual as well as the aesthetic sense) from *The Granta Book of the American Short Story*, edited by Richard Ford. Ford is one of the most accomplished practitioners of what has come to be called "dirty realism," and *Granta*, the English magazine under whose aegis his anthology was put together, has been one of the leading showcases for this type of writing.

Dirty realism might be defined as the working-class arm of minimalism. While it deals with the same sort of impoverished experience, in the same sort of impoverished language, its characters tend to be not only alienated and depressed but desperately broke; often drunk or stoned, they are just as likely to be petty criminals as not. Yet whatever the limitations of this school, it has at least produced some better stories than middle- and upper-middle-class minimalism. Ford's own work, for example, is more compelling than the chronicles of affluent alienation fashioned by Ann Beattie or David Leavitt, both of whom he includes in this anthology while leaving himself out.

Unfortunately, the temperament that makes someone a better-than-average minimalist may not make him a better-than-average anthologist. In his introduction, Ford tells us that "the stories I've included are finally simply ones I like," and there is no reason to doubt his word. All we can conclude as we read his selection of short stories from the past 50 years is that, perhaps more than he knows, his taste in literature has been shaped by his own involvement with a certain type of writing (or maybe it is the other way around). For despite his allusions in the introduction to Frank O'Connor, the author of some of the sweetest and funniest and wisest stories produced in this century, Ford seems strangely attracted to a certain kind of bleak-

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ness and flatness on the one hand and to emotional superficiality on the other.

This is most noticeable in his selections from writers of his own generation; among earlier writers his choices seem, at first, cheerfully eclectic, ranging from Shirley Jackson's middlebrow classic "The Lottery" (1948), to Bernard Malamud's powerful and poetic "The Magic Barrel" (1954), to a wonderfully rhapsodic early Harold Brodkey story, "The State of Grace" (1954). But it is striking how joyless, how finally inert, this collection is for most of its 700 pages—how underpopulated by vivid human beings (Brodkey's and Malamud's characters are exceptions, as are Jean Stafford's in "In the Zoo" [1964], Stanley Elkin's in "A Poetics for Bullies" [1965], and Flannery O'Connor's in "Good Country People" [1955]); how short on intense emotion.

Instead, we get various elaborate mannerisms, hollow substitutes: in Cheever's "O City of Broken Dreams" (1948), about a family of innocent rubes among the sharks of New York—surely one of the worst things he ever wrote—an embarrassingly sentimental facetiousness; in James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" (1957; included also in Oates's anthology), a willed hysteria, a tendentious insistence on the heroism of a jazz musician's pain; in John Updike's "Here Come the Maples" (1976), uncharacteristic coyness. And in "playful" entries by the ham-fisted Kurt Vonnegut and the even more ham-fisted William Kotzwinkle, cutesy eccentricity.

THEN we come to the minimalists themselves, in many of whose stories the characters seem hardly individuated at all, more like absences than presences, and emotional flatness takes over with a vengeance. Again, there are exceptions. The late Raymond Carver, who might be called the founding father of minimalism and is probably its best practitioner, manages in "Are These Actual Miles?" (1972; also Oates's choice among Carver's stories) to make us believe that more is going on inside his inarticulate character—a man whose wife is off sleeping with a used-car dealer in order to get the best price possible on their only remaining possession—than he tells us explicitly; at its best, Carver's laconic prose seems not so much flat as tense with unexpressed pain. And in "The Rich Brother" (1985), Tobias Wolff, whose work always exhibits a tenderness and humor that distinguish him from the run of dirty realists, beautifully evokes the involuntary love that a prosperous, down-to-earth businessman feels for his exasperating brother, a holier-than-thou hippie loser. In these stories, the epiphanies—for minimalist stories have epiphanies too, of however tenuous a kind—are genuinely earned.

But in the stories by Mary Robison, by Ann Beattie, by Richard Bausch, by David Leavitt, by Joy Williams, by Lorrie Moore, the emotional tone is simply numb rather than suggestive of banked-down feeling, and the epiphanies mere dull blips along our screen of vision. Then, too, the revelations experienced are predictably dismal: this depressed woman is going to leave her husband, that depressed woman is going to dump her unappetizing fiancé. In neither case do we quite understand why, but it is hard to care very much, either. The emptiness of these stories leaves one feeling not so much that modern life is unutterably dreary as that modern literature is unaccountably so. For all the ills of our society, the bloodlessness of such writing seems more a function of artistic and/or emotional laziness than of any profound insight into the alienation of American life.

In the same way, it seems intellectually lazy of Ford to have rounded up the usual fashionable suspects rather than casting his net a little wider; he could so easily have heightened the energy level and broadened the range of this collection by including, for example, an emotionally charged story like Charles Baxter's "Gryphon" (1985), or one of Kelly Cherry's lyrical, meditative fictions, or even something from Deborah Eisenberg's *Transactions in a Foreign Currency* (1986), in which highly modern states of mind take on some of the delicate permutations of old-fashioned feelings. Perhaps depression, at least in art, is doomed always to seem merely trivial. If it is impossible to summon up rage or grief or horror, a writer might be better off being simply cheerful.

WHICH brings us to a third recently published collection of American short stories—this one limited to Jewish writers.* Compared with Ford's in particular, this anthology exhibits a quite surprising emotional liveliness. Inevitably, there are some merely slight or tedious entries—including a minimalist story by Michael Chabon in which the protagonist achieves the revelation that no one ever finds the love of his dreams—but over half actually traffic in passionate human feeling.

Even those stories which touch on the Holocaust are never merely bleak. Cynthia Ozick's powerful, half-mystical "Bloodshed" (1976) rises to a kind of mad elation; Lore Segal's "The Reverse Bug" (1989), which also deserts straightforward realism in grappling with its theme, is too full of eloquent sorrow to be depressing; and Deirdre Levinson's "April 19th, 1985" (1991), in which a mother's moral exasperation with her "light-minded" children gives way to an experience of overwhelming love at a memorial gathering on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, is perhaps the most purely moving story in the book.

Indeed, depression is so much *not* the prevailing mood in *Writing Our Way Home* that it seems worth asking why that should be so. Of course, the preferences of the editors are largely responsible—clearly, they are not drawn to the literature of impoverishment—but what might be called the consolations of religion have something to do with it as well. The alienation of characters in minimalist fiction is often accounted for by the fact of their being inhabitants of an eternal present—adrift in the world

* *Writing Our Way Home: Contemporary Stories by American Jewish Writers*, edited by Ted Solotaroff and Nessa Rappoport. Schocken Books, 380 pp., $23.00.

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with no sense of their roots, their history, a connection to their community. Indeed, it has been argued that whereas traditional fiction explored the interrelatedness of people in a stable society, now the social fabric has been rent permanently asunder, leaving no possible framework within which characters can play out their lives.

IN MANY of the stories in *Writing Our Way Home*, such a framework is provided by religion—although it may be a matter less of religious belief *per se* than of religious identity, or attachment to the heritage of a tribe. In Max Apple's "The Eighth Day" (1983), for example, a thoroughly modern young man in love with a zealous advocate of therapy allows her to persuade him that he must reenact the trauma of his circumcision. When he and his Gentile girlfriend seek out the man who circumcised him—a sort of gloomy holy fool—the conversation that ensues may not make him go home and pray, but it does restore his peace of mind without benefit of therapy.

On a different note, the fussily self-important nonbeliever in Allegra Goodman's witty "Variant Text,"* although he refuses any relationship with God, nevertheless scrupulously adheres to Jewish law and has a definite, belligerent relationship with every human being around him that is defined by his stance toward Judaism. And in Johanna Kaplan's *Sickness*,† the young narrator's dreary life in the Bronx is lent a romantic splendor by her immersion in several millennia of Jewish history. Even in Philip Roth's richly imagined "I Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting" (1973)—in which we are given Franz Kafka as Roth might have known him if he had not died in 1924 but emigrated to New Jersey right before the Holocaust—Roth's love of Kafka, his sense of him as someone uncannily familiar, is very much grounded in the (secular) Jewishness they share.

IT MAY seem unrealistic to propose that religion will be the savior of the short story (although one can imagine a similarly satisfying collection of Catholic and lapsed-Catholic stories). But it is heartening to be reminded that strong stories do continue to be written—and it is likewise heartening to contemplate the increasing disaffection with minimalism, which may now have run its course. Is it too much to hope that, barring the emergence of some new and even more trivial fashion, real diversity—not of gender and race, but of individual experience—may yet take over again in the short story, and that we will be treated to a variety of distinctive voices, rather than a generic drone?

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* First published in COMMENTARY, June 1986.

† First published in COMMENTARY, December 1968.

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Our Country & Our Culture

THE DREAM AND THE NIGHTMARE. By MYRON MAGNET. *Morrow. 320 pp. $20.00.*

Reviewed by CHESTER E. FINN, JR.

THE 1992 election campaign included much chatter about "welfare reform," mostly centered on the need to oblige aid recipients to take jobs. But Republicans who raised the issue of "family values" were decried as archaic, narrow-minded, and nasty, even discriminatory. For their part, the Democrats, despite endless palaver about "meeting the needs of children," expended (and continue to expend) greater energy on the military's policy toward homosexuals than on the condition of families with offspring.

It says as much about our culture as about our political discourse that invoking the traditional two-parent family should have become problematic in the context of a national election. Yet the inability to give candid attention to these matters reduces the likelihood of their being properly addressed. If we have truly lost the consensus that unformed families or children without married parents are symptoms of societal distress, and cannot even talk honestly about the problem, the odds of finding a solution to it will soon approach the vanishing point.

The cultural convulsions that produced, among other things, this ambivalence toward the "nuclear family" are the subject of *The Dream and the Nightmare*, a new book by Myron Magnet of *Fortune* magazine, which bears the subtitle, "The Sixties' Legacy to the Underclass." Though written in a more popular style than Charles Murray's *Losing Ground*, Magnet's book, lucid, insightful, and often wise, could serve the mid-90's much as Murray's served the mid-80's, compelling a reexamination of assumptions about the hard-core disadvantaged and how they came to be that way.

The presence of this population is no longer in much dispute. Few today attempt to deny that the U.S. contains a sizable "underclass" with all sorts of negative features and dysfunctional characteristics, not least the tendency to perpetuate itself from generation to generation. Thanks first of all to Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and then to Charles Murray, Ken Auletta, and William Julius Wilson, this much is generally acknowledged. The great social-policy debate of the past decade has instead involved the issue of causation.

One camp believes that the pattern of unwholesome behavior we associate with the underclass was triggered—and is maintained—by discrimination and victimization. This theory holds actual members of the underclass largely blameless for the situation in which they find themselves. While their actions at the retail level may be foolish, unavailing, even harmful, the wholesale explanation for their plight is to be found in the larger society (and economy), and it is there—according to this analysis—that one must look for changes that will alter the condition of individuals.

The second camp contends that the sources of the underclass are located in values, attitudes, character, and individual behavior, and that the path out of this thicket runs through sound families, strong values, self-discipline, and good character. In this view, the larger society did not create the underclass, though misguided policies have helped to entrench it through such perverse incentives as welfare programs that reward dependency and illegitimacy and through neglect of economic growth, law-enforcement, educational standards, and other measures that might cause some discomfort in the short run but would ultimately improve people's circumstances. Our public policies, in other words, share culpability insofar as they have damaged the incentive-and-punishment structures within which people are more apt to behave properly. But according to this view, the individual, not the society in which he lives, retains responsibility for his own behavior and the well-being of his progeny.

AS STATED, the positions in this debate are almost tiresomely familiar. Of late, however, the debate has begun to acquire some interesting new elements. Amitai Etzioni and his fellow "communitarians" are one source. Overlapping with them are a number of thinkers and politicians linked to the Democratic Leadership Council and Progressive Policy Institute, people whose ideas helped achieve the Clinton-Gore victory in 1992 and who may (but, as it now appears, probably will not) figure prominently in the new administration.

If these people can be thought of as complicating the old positions in the debate from the Left, Magnet's book is an example of complicating from the Right. Unlike most other conservative commentators, Magnet does hold the larger society to account for the spread and persistence of the American underclass. But unlike most liberals, he emphasizes not economic factors, or patterns of alleged discrimination practiced by society, but rather the values, ideas, and attitudes that society instills.

Magnet's thesis is that during the 60's and 70's the elite culture—the dominant culture—of the United States fomented attitudes and expectations that gave rise in the 80's to today's horrendous rates of illegitimacy, dependency, crime, etc. He underscores three of those attitudes: first, revisionist notions about poverty itself, according to which disadvantage was the consequence of exploitation, prejudice, and opportunity denied rather than of a lack of skills, energy, or character. Second, the sexual revolution, with its strong, malign impact on family structure. And third, the counter-

CHESTER E. FINN, JR., *who served as Assistant Secretary of Education from 1985 to 1988, is founding partner and senior scholar at the Edison Project in Washington, D.C.*

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culture's generalized scorn for authority, standards, merit, tradition, and behavioral norms, together with its embrace of indolence, self-indulgence, protest, sometimes even violence.

For the middle classes, this upheaval of values was damaging enough. For the poor, it was devastating. "Poverty turned pathological," Magnet contends,

> because the new culture that the Haves invented—their remade system of beliefs, norms, and institutions—permitted, even celebrated, behavior that, when poor people practice it, will imprison them inextricably in poverty. It's hard to persuade ghetto fifteen-year-olds not to get pregnant, for instance, when the entire culture, from rock music to upscale perfume commercials to highbrow books, is intoxicated with the joy of what before AIDS was called "recreational" sex.

Thus withered the sense of accountability for the consequences of one's own (and one's children's) actions. Thus deepened the "what, me worry?" mind-set which followed upon the conclusion that, lacking control over those consequences, one need not try very hard to alter them—indeed, that it was fruitless to do so.

Rather than throwing out an anchor to people tossed by such stormy seas, the revamped culture intensified the waves that menaced them. It told people that instead of working diligently at an entry-level job, they should reject it as degrading. Instead of marrying the mother of one's child, one might as well proceed heedlessly to new sexual conquests. Rather than raising children to be law-abiding, drug-free, and God-fearing, one could permit them to imbibe the hedonism, "presentism," and lawlessness of the streets. With families in disrepair and in some disrepute, with the churches into "liberation theology," with the media pounding out the beats of liberation and libertinism, with the schools and universities stripped of authority, and with the courts pressing for new "rights" rather than locking up criminals—where, save at the knees of a few old fogies, was anyone to learn how to behave properly?

THE dominant culture, Magnet contends, is responsible for this shambles of values and its deadly consequences for the poor, and he is essentially correct. His analysis is clarifying, his logic is powerful, and his examples are apt. But a problem accompanies this diagnosis, and it parallels one that I have encountered in a hundred (or is it now a thousand?) conferences I have attended and conversations I have held about the condition of American education. I think of it as the "nothing-can-be-done-about-*this*-problem-until-all-the-others-are-solved" syndrome.

Thus, at the conclusion of a discourse on what is wrong with education and what we should do differently, someone will nearly always rise from the audience and assert that the schools are enveloped by a society so corrupt that they cannot reasonably be expected to do any better until all the corruption is rooted out. Teachers and principals will insist that parents must alter their child-rearing practices before schools can teach more math or geography. Professors will argue that until we compensate intellectuals and teachers as we do athletes and rock stars, we will signal to youngsters that we do not truly value academic accomplishment. Employers will complain that the schools are failing to produce graduates with the requisite skills and knowledge, and teachers and administrators will retort that employers (and universities) have failed to be clear about what they are looking for and anyway do not reward those who bring it. And so on.

Such litanies certainly support Magnet's point that America has succumbed to a virtual cult of blame-shifting, has become a no-fault land in which everyone feels free to slough off responsibility for just about everything. That the buck never stops anywhere is indeed a legacy of our past several

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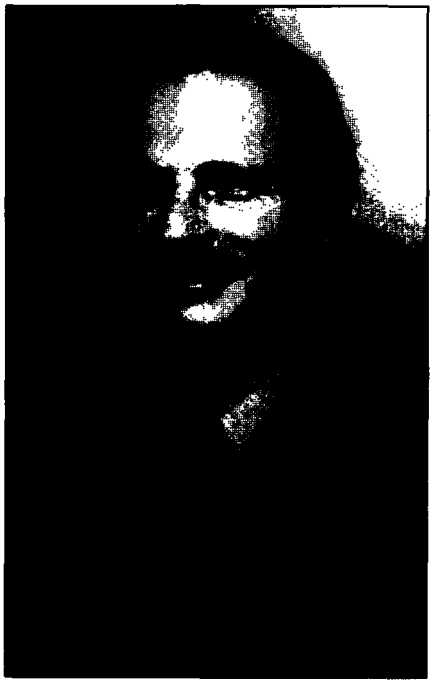

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decades. But down this path also lies an intellectual and policy snarl as knotty as the circumstances of the underclass itself. If nobody can be held to account for anything, and no problem can be solved until all of them are, then we are beckoned by hopelessness.

WHAT exactly is to be done in *this* lifetime, in *this* country? Here Magnet's otherwise excellent volume is less satisfactory. His final pages, though not despairing, are none too helpful. He is clear about the ideas we ought to resurrect, the values that need to be reinforced; and all that is fine as far as it goes. But just how does one repair a tattered culture? How do we actually set about to change entrenched patterns of belief and behavior? Magnet does not say.

A few months into the Clinton administration, it is fairly clear that we cannot look for such repairs to come from the White House. Indeed, the new team is already paying homage to ideas this book deplores. Perhaps it was inevitable that the unprecedented hybrid of politics, Hollywood, leftist interest groups, and New-Agers that now holds sway in Washington would tug the country further in these same directions.

Where, then, to turn? The Buchananites and the religious Right have put themselves forward as a beacon of sorts, but taken all in all, the alternative they propound will strike few as an improvement. We surely have more to hear from the communitarians, and that is no doubt a good thing. My own expectations are higher, though, for the ventures being launched by the likes of William J. Bennett, Jack Kemp, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Vin Weber, William Kristol, and Lamar Alexander: efforts to construct a new framework of ideas for conservatism and a broad new political base for the Republican party. These people understand better than most what has happened to the culture and are impelled by the urgency of rectifying it. In a few years, perhaps, they will be ready to write the missing chapter of Myron Magnet's book. And then maybe the 1996 election will occasion the searching, sober discussion that we need about our values—family and otherwise.

Good vs. Evil

THE FINAL REVOLUTION: THE RESISTANCE CHURCH AND THE COLLAPSE OF COMMUNISM. By GEORGE WEIGEL. *Oxford University Press. 255 pp. $25.00.*

Reviewed by ARCH PUDDINGTON

WHEN asked, Who killed Communism?, most experts usually respond with the name of one or both of the two superpower leaders of the 1980's: Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. George Weigel now argues that major credit for the anti-Communist revolution should be given to another world figure, Pope John Paul II. It is Weigel's contention that the Pope's role, and the role of religious belief generally, have been much undervalued in the various assessments of the overthrow of Communism in Eastern Europe.

Weigel, who serves as president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, is the author of a number of writings on the relationships among religion, politics, and culture, with a special focus on the Catholic Church's participation in public life. A Catholic himself, he dealt often, and critically, with the Church's stance toward American foreign policy during the late cold-war years when some American bishops seemed more concerned about cruise missiles than about the struggle between freedom and totalitarianism, and when segments of the Church declared open solidarity with the authoritarian Left in Latin America.

Here, however, Weigel has the rare opportunity to analyze a genuine triumph, a victory of Good over Evil, in which a principal victim of tyranny helped shape the struggle which led to tyranny's downfall. Weigel takes up the task with relish, all the more so because of his obvious admiration for John Paul II, whom he counts as one of the truly great figures of modern times.

It should be noted that *The Final Revolution* is for the most part narrowly focused on the Catholic Church's response to its Communist oppressors in only two countries, Poland and Czechoslovakia. One wishes that Weigel had undertaken a more comprehensive analysis of the part religion played in the fall of Communism. For while the role of the Church in Poland's emergence from Communist domination is clear, the pattern of events in other parts of the Soviet empire was much different. This was particularly true in countries like Romania and Bulgaria, where Eastern Orthodoxy is the predominant faith, and where the church hierarchy had often compiled a record of collaboration with Communist authorities and played little or no role in the actions which led to the collapse of the old order.

Weigel does not contend that the influence of organized religion was universal throughout these countries. But he does insist that the rejection of Communism was driven by certain transcendent values which derive from the Western religious tradition. He describes the events of 1989 as

> a revolution of the human spirit, frequently informed by a reinvigorated Christian (often Catholic) faith, which proved to be the irresistible force that the Communist enterprise could not finally withstand.

On this score he is largely correct. The upsurge of emotional support evoked by Vaclav Havel and the other secular intellectuals of Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution stemmed in large measure from the fact that they based their actions on spiritual and humane principles, and consciously rejected the materialist or millenarian vocabulary traditionally associated with revolution. It was immediately understood that a revolution led by Havel or Lech Walesa would be committed to the expansion of freedom and the establishment of the rule of law, which is why far more enthusiasm greeted their triumph than that of the African National Congress, whose

ARCH PUDDINGTON *works for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in New York and is the author of* Failed Utopias *(ICS Press).*

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semi-Marxist rhetoric sends the disturbing message that, should it attain power in South Africa, class and racial revenge will be the first order of business.

THE story Weigel tells begins with the persecution of the Catholic Church by the Communist authorities when they took power in Eastern Europe after World War II. Priests were executed, jailed, or sent into forced-labor service, monasteries were disbanded, churches seized by the state, and the Church hierarchy stripped of the right to control its own internal affairs. Religion was not destroyed, but, with one exception, it was made subordinate to the state, and various steps were taken to bring about a steady withering-away of religious belief. Severe constraints were placed on the religious education of the young, believers were made subject to various forms of discrimination, priests who showed an inclination toward dissent were stripped of the right to perform their religious duties.

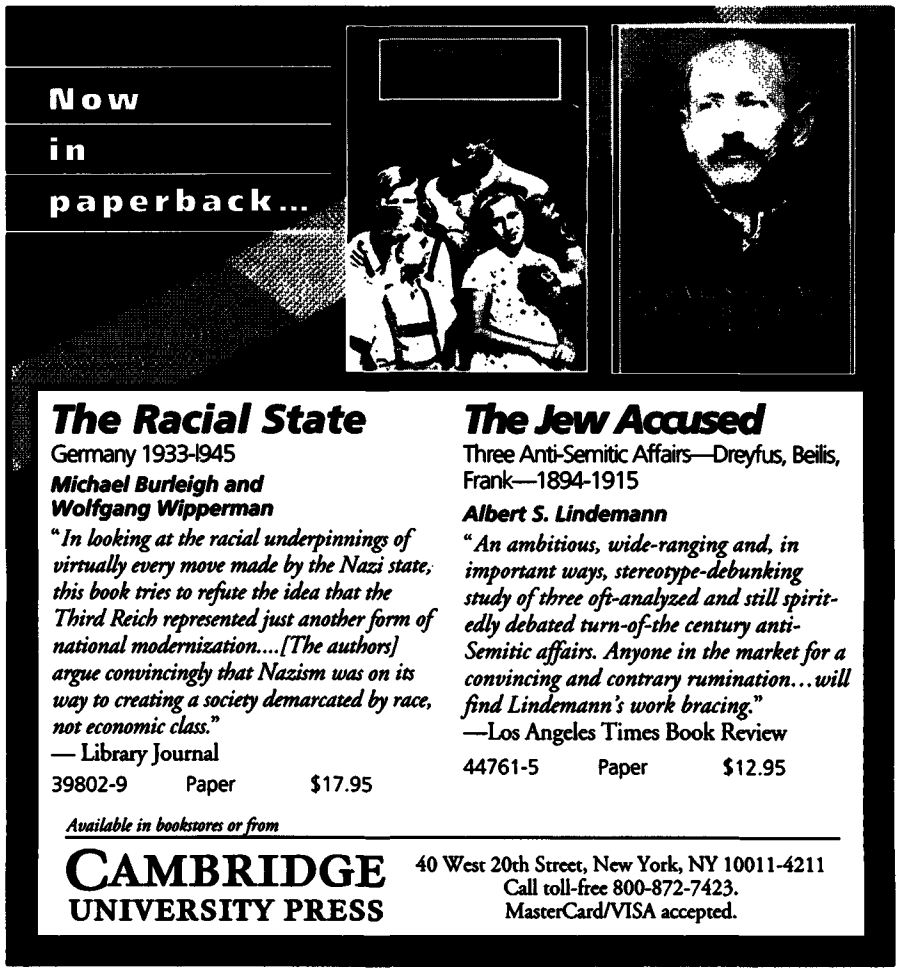
The exception, as Weigel writes, was Poland, the most intensely Catholic of East European nations and a country where the Church and the national idea were closely intertwined. Not that the anti-religious prejudices of Poland's Communists were any less powerful than those of Communists elsewhere. But their repressive tactics largely failed in Poland, where strong religious identification, intense popular anti-Communism, and a politically shrewd Church leadership combined to ensure a measure of religious autonomy unique in the Communist world.

A key figure in the struggle between Church and party was Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski, Poland's primate during most of the Communist era. Harassed and placed under house arrest in the early years of the Communist regime, Wyszynski was released once it became clear to the authorities that an accommodation with the Church was essential if a violent rebellion was to be averted. While Wyszynski seldom challenged the state directly, he employed a kind of coded language and symbolic gesture to demonstrate his disapproval of Communist policies and make clear his solidarity with the people.

Wyszynski was not reckless, Weigel points out. Indeed, he was sometimes criticized by intellectual dissidents for being overcautious, and for calling for patience and restraint during the periodic upheavals which marked Poland under Communist rule. From Wyszynski's perspective, however, the very possibility of Polish independence was tied inseparably to the autonomy of the Church. Religion had been all but destroyed in other Communist countries, and a Soviet invasion—a near-occurrence in 1956—could never be ruled out. In any event, Wyszynski's leadership must be ultimately judged on the basis of his greatest achievement—establishing the Church as a source of permanent opposition to Communist rule, an institutionalized focus of anti-Communism whose independence was largely unaffected even during the martial-law period of the early 1980's.

As Weigel shows, the Polish Church's achievement was especially notable given the drift toward accommodation with Communism which marked the general diplomacy of the Vatican beginning in the mid-1960's. During the early years of the cold war, the Vatican had adopted a militant, and largely ineffectual, attitude toward Communist governments; then, under Pope Paul VI, it moved in the opposite direction, adopting a form of détente under which an unspoken bargain was struck between Rome and Moscow. The Church would no longer anathematize Communism as a system incompatible with Christian values; in return, the East European regimes would permit the Church a measure of freedom in running its internal affairs.

The Communist part of the bargain was, predictably, never fulfilled. As for the Vatican, in its desire to avoid offending Communist authorities, it made the same kind of dismal compromises with principle that Western governments



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slid into during this same period. In one disturbing episode, a papal envoy was dispatched to Czechoslovakia to put an end to the underground religious work of a bishop who was irritating the post-Prague Spring regime by carrying out the clandestine ordination of priests.

IN LIGHT of the general drift in both the Vatican and the wider diplomatic world in the late 1970's, the reorientation of papal foreign policy implemented by John Paul II looms as even more impressive. As a Pole who had spent his adult life under Communist rule, this Pope understood not only the inherently evil nature of Communism, but also its vulnerabilities. Like his mentor, Cardinal Wyszynski, John Paul II was adept at employing the symbolism and language of the Catholic Church to drive home a message whose subversive elements were well understood by the people despite its surface innocuousness.

John Paul II's pilgrimage to Poland in 1979—his first visit to his native land as pontiff—is reckoned by Weigel as the symbolic beginning of the process which ten years later ended in the demise of East European Communism. Massive throngs greeted the Pope throughout his visit, and the Pope, in clear if understated language, reassured them that the Church stood with them against foreign domination and Communist misrule. He pointedly declared that "Christ will never agree to man being viewed only as a means of production"; he urged Poles to follow an "inner truth" and avoid conformity; he spoke of the right to self-determination and integrity; and he made an audacious call for Slavic solidarity in the face of an unnamed, common enemy.

The consequences of all this were far-reaching. The Pope's words and the huge crowds that greeted them clarified a political situation in which practically an entire nation stood in opposition to a small cluster of Communist officials ruling solely by dint of their control of the apparatus of repression and the threat of Soviet invasion. Poland's domestic opposition, traditionally divided, emerged relatively united, as even those intellectual dissidents suspicious of the Church's role acknowledged the power of the Pope's themes. One year later, intellectuals, workers, and believers all came together in a series of mass strikes which led to the formation of Solidarity, the first overtly anti-Communist institution established in a Communist-controlled state.

POLAND, of course, is but one of a number of countries to have shed the yoke of Communism; its significance lies in its having been the first in which a period of upheaval was not followed by a return to absolute party rule. It thus became the opening wedge in a process which culminated in the collapse of the entire Communist edifice (and which Weigel traces in detail in the case of Czechoslovakia as well as Poland).

Is it possible that the Pope sensed this larger prospect from the very beginning? Weigel thinks it is indeed possible, that in fact the Pope believed he had been chosen by God to lead the Church in the final struggle against Communism. What we have in *The Final Revolution*, then, is an inspirational story of a great political and spiritual victory, a victory achieved over considerable odds and often in the face of the indifference of much of the world's secular leadership.

But why have the achievements of the Catholic Church, or at least of John Paul II, not been given their rightful place of prominence by the analysts and experts? Part of the answer can be found in the attitude of Western organized religion in general toward the cold war. Weigel, often a sharp critic of the neutralist tendencies which infected elements of Christianity during the latter phases of the conflict, here reminds us that the East European revolution, a triumph for the "resistance Church" in Poland and other countries, did not seem a triumph to Christian leaders in the West, who insisted to the bitter end that political changes in the East could occur only after arms-control agreements had been negotiated. Nor is there any evidence that the "peace" forces within organized Christianity in the West learned the right lesson from Communism's collapse; their response to the victory of anti-Communism was embarrassed silence, not, as Weigel wishes it might have been, joy at the downfall of Christianity's sworn enemies.

Finally, one suspects much of the answer lies in the ambivalence of the secular world toward any hint of renewed religious strength. This apprehension is reflected in statements which in one breath will bemoan the decline in traditional morality and in the next breath express the fear that (for instance) the Catholic Church in Poland is attempting to establish a clerical state (the evidence being the Church's tough stand against abortion). As for the Pope, he is viewed with wariness precisely because he is a man of powerful convictions with the ability occasionally to see his vision realized. Many, no doubt, would prefer a pontiff who projected a more reassuring, more "modern," more compromising image.

Fortunately, John Paul II is none of these things, and when the oppressed people of the Communist world needed his iron integrity and rare political skills, he was there to provide them. It is also fortunate that George Weigel has given us this informative, necessary, and often moving account of what will certainly go down as John Paul II's most memorable success.

Not Science Fiction

IN OUR OWN IMAGE: BUILDING AN ARTIFICIAL PERSON. By MAUREEN CAUDILL. *Oxford University Press. 242 pp. $23.00.*

ARTIFICIAL LIFE: THE QUEST FOR A NEW CREATION. By STEVEN LEVY. *Pantheon. 390 pp. $25.00.*

Reviewed by JEFFREY MARSH

WHY can't a machine be more like a man? After her rapid but thorough discussion of current research in a wide variety of com-

JEFFREY MARSH *writes frequently on science in* COMMENTARY *and elsewhere.*

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puter-related fields, Maureen Caudill feels able to answer the question. Essentially her answer is: it can be—and maybe better.

This reply should come as a surprise to anyone who has had any contact with today's computers, which, though extremely competent at performing some tasks that challenge even intellectually gifted adults, are yet totally incapable of others that young children accomplish without effort. For example, computers have been programmed to play chess at the grandmaster level, but it has so far proved impossible to build a robot that can walk across a room as well as the average two-year-old.

Caudill suggests that this situation will change fairly soon. Computer scientists, she writes, now recognize that many human skills, since they do not rely solely on logical reasoning, cannot be duplicated by traditional computers, which are suited only for well-defined tasks that can be performed in a systematic and logical fashion. Therefore, instead of relying solely on logic, researchers have refocused their attention on the way human and animal bodies and brains actually operate, and how human skills develop.

USING insights gained in this fashion, scientists have found a variety of ingenious methods—summed up in the catchall term, "artificial intelligence"—to attack commonsense problems of the kind in which computer logic must be supplemented with factual knowledge of the real world. And they have achieved some success in building simple models of a variety of human skills by abandoning digital computers in favor of neural networks: arrays of simple electronic elements (neurodes) in which each element is connected to all the others in a way patterned on the arrangement of elementary brain cells (neurons) in humans and animals.

Neural networks, for example, can "learn" to recognize patterns. Much as animal behavior can be conditioned by methods long known to animal trainers and intensively studied by psychologists, these electronic systems can be trained to produce a desired output signal when presented with a particular input. Initially, the network will respond by producing something quite different from what is desired. The training process then consists of repeatedly presenting the network with the same input while systematically adjusting the connections among the neurons until the actual output is identical with the desired one.

As an expert on neural networks, Caudill believes that growing sophistication in their use, together with advances in understanding how intelligent behavior can be modeled, will help machines acquire the qualities required by an android—an intelligent robot with near-human skills. Her ambitious list includes: mobility; dexterity and tactile skills; memory; vision; hearing; learning ability; problem-solving ability; speech-generation and -comprehension; and a basic knowledge of common-sense facts about the worlds of nature and society. Preferably, the whole device would be contained in a package bearing a general resemblance to the human body.

Caudill reviews, clearly if sometimes in so much detail as to daunt the nontechnical reader, the progress made so far toward this ultimate goal by researchers working in artificial intelligence, neural networks, and robotics. While admitting frankly that current systems are drastically limited in their ability to perform even the less ambitious items on her list, she is optimistic about future progress, assuming that rapidly developing computer technology will be able to overcome all deficiencies.

IN THE concluding part of her book, Caudill ponders a number of nontechnical issues. Some have been familiar since the industrial revolution, when the replacement of human labor by machines that could surpass men in brute force or in specialized repetitive skills produced major social changes. As she writes, far greater changes—and far deeper psychological reactions—would surely follow upon the introduction of machines that could compete with people on a near-equal level.

One troubling issue is what would then happen to the relationship between humans and the machines they have created. Caudill argues that a true android with all the capabilities she specifies—particularly the ability to communicate intelligently with humans—would of necessity also possess the consciousness and self-awareness that have until now been the signs of human uniqueness. The main question this raises for her is rather surprising. Under such circumstances, she proposes, the use of androids merely as servants to carry out human purposes would amount to slavery, and would therefore be morally unacceptable. (Caudill also believes that it is morally wrong for people to enslave animals.)

She takes this line of thought even further. Androids, once beyond a certain stage of development, would be able to replicate themselves and even to produce continuously improving models. Taken together with their other capabilities, this means that androids would eventually possess all the qualities needed to meet the biologists' definition of life itself, albeit with a different chemical basis from life as we know it today. This new form of life, Caudill believes, would fairly quickly prove superior to humanity, with all its well-known flaws. In light of her concern about slavery, she therefore concludes that we would be well-advised to treat the first primitive androids nicely, in the hope that their descendants will not at some time in the future take an appropriate revenge on us.

WITH sentiments like these, one might be tempted to think we have passed into the realm of science fiction. After all, it may never be possible for computers to develop the skills Caudill describes, and even if clever engineers were able to program machines to mimic human behavior, they would still be machines, not living creatures—no matter how biologists or positivist philosophers care to define life.

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Not so, according to the scientists whose work is described in Steven Levy's *Artificial Life: The Quest for a New Creation*. If anything, researchers modeling living systems of various types have gone beyond Caudill's conclusion that robots may one day evolve into a form of life to the more radical belief that computer programs can already not only model life but even embody it.

While Caudill concentrates on specific technologies, Levy devotes much of his book to theoretical explanations of computer science and to limning the often colorful personalities who inhabit the small world of artificial-life research. He begins with the hypothesis, put forward 50-odd years ago by the polymathic genius John von Neumann, that it would be theoretically possible to design what von Neumann called a self-reproducing automaton. This would be a device that could not only make copies of itself but also serve as the universal computer imagined by Alan Turing, a computer which could model any machine in the world—including, Turing asserted, a living creature.

In the 1980's, mathematicians intrigued by von Neumann's suggestion began to play with systems known as cellular automata, whose behavior is determined by a few simple rules. One, the Englishman John Conway, invented a game he called Life. The game began as a checkerboard populated by a few black dots which were born, continued living, or died, depending on what their neighboring "cells" were doing. It soon turned out that this simple system could give rise to unexpectedly complex behavior, as the dots formed different geometric configurations that were able to move in different ways. Soon it proved too time-consuming to follow the system's moves with pencil and paper (or, to be more accurate, with shells on the floor of the Oxford common room where the game started), and so a computer was enlisted which could rapidly track the system's evolution through thousands of generations.

Later researchers found that they could use different cellular automata to model the behavior of real living systems surprisingly well. One, for example, put on his computer screen a large number of creatures he called "boids," and, assuming that each one would fly in a direction influenced by what its closest neighbors were doing, discovered that the whole population behaved in a way that described flocking birds better than ornithologists had previously been able to do.

Cellular automata provide only one example of how computers can model living processes. There is, for example, a close analogy between the way DNA molecules control the development and reproduction of living creatures and the way programs both embody and direct a computer's flow of information. As Levy shows, this analogy has been used fruitfully as a tool to investigate in detail the development and workings of biological systems—and, in reverse, to improve computer programs and systems, including the kinds needed to solve the problems discussed in Caudill's book.

But where Caudill is content to suggest that solving those problems will in time enable man to create new kinds of living creatures, some of Levy's researchers believe that man has already created at least one new form of life—namely, computer viruses. According to these scientists, such viruses demonstrate all the essential features of life: organization, self-reproduction, and an ability to evolve. Other scientists, although waiting for something a little more ambitious and less troublesome to come along, agree that it has already become possible to conceive of life *within* a computer. None, in the light of these developments, would be willing to concede that the human species can expect to retain forever its sovereign position in the world.

Since the Darwinian revolution, many biologists have taken it as a fundamental truth that man is simply one species among others, a species with no claim to a special place in the universe but whose current supremacy is simply the lucky and quite likely transient result of a series of random changes in his genes. Therefore, as Caudill says explicitly, if androids come to replace man, so be it: that is just the way evolution works. Or, in the words of the physicist Norman Packard, quoted by Levy,

> There's a harmony to the evolutionary process . . . completely divorced from the existence or the maintenance of a particular species.

But if this is so, why should Caudill be so concerned about the morality of slavery, or about man's mistreatment of other species? And why does Packard go on to say that "the only thing that worries" him is "that somehow we would be so inept as to introduce an element of cruelty in our successors"? A cursory glance around the world of nature confirms that such issues are of no concern whatsoever to any species other than man.

Is man different after all? The most impressive phenomenon discovered over and over again by Levy's artificial-life researchers is that of "emergence": the behavior of large systems of individual entities repeatedly following simple rules over long periods of time produces collective results that are qualitatively new, unpredictable, and often surprisingly complex. The human mind (unaided by computers) cannot grasp the emergent properties of even the simple rules it imposes on simple systems. But it is clear that those rules determine those emergent properties.

For artificial-life systems, the rules are made by humans. Thus, to anyone who believes that man does have a special role in the universe, the development of computers at this moment in history may serve as a particularly timely reminder that the existence of rules is a fundamental property of the universe. Machines may one day learn to mimic much of man's ability to manipulate nature, but the uniqueness of man remains: he is the only creature who has been given both the ability to understand that there are rules of nature and the freedom—but only at his own risk—to disregard them.

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From Moses to Moritz

THE JEWS OF GERMANY: A HISTORICAL PORTRAIT. By RUTH GAY. *Yale University Press. 297 pp. $35.00.*

THE STIGMA OF NAMES: ANTI-SEMITISM IN GERMAN DAILY LIFE, 1812-1933. By DIETZ BERING. Translated by NEVILLE PLAICE. *University of Michigan Press. 360 pp. $49.50.*

Reviewed by JERRY Z. MULLER

FOR several decades after World War II, the modern history of the Jews in Germany tended to be seen as an object lesson. The rapidity of their rise—from despised outsiders into economically successful and culturally fecund contributors to German life—combined and contrasted with the horror of their end, seemed to offer a paradigm, a moral. But what was the moral? What wisdom did the history of German Jews convey? Their ultimate demise was cited by historians as evidence of the failure of Enlightenment, and alternatively of the failure of the failure of Enlightenment; of the snare of assimilation, and alternatively of the contribution of emancipated Jewry to European culture.

In any case, as the late Gerson Cohen pointed out, it was German Jewry that provided Jews everywhere with models of almost every possible variety of response to modernity. From radical assimilation to militant Zionism, from Reform Judaism to neo-Orthodoxy, and from the historical understanding of Jewish history to modern Bible scholarship, it was in Germany that the Jewish encounter with modernity was most productive of new forms of Jewish self-understanding.

Recently, the history of the Jews in Germany has become a subject less marked by either filiopietism or partisanship. A new scholarship has arisen, fostered in large part by the Leo Baeck Institute with its branches in New York, London, and Jerusalem; indeed, in both quality and quantity, the new historical scholarship on German Jewry outstrips the present-day study of the far larger Jewish communities of Eastern Europe.

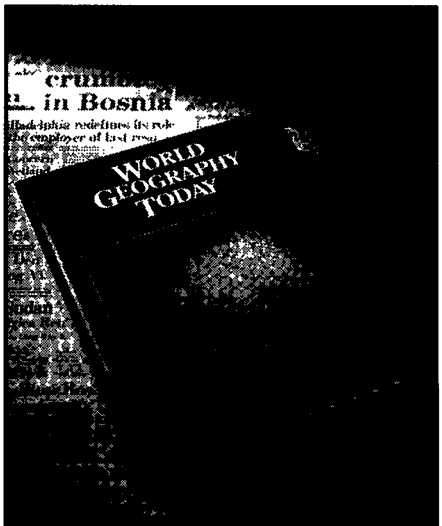
Ruth Gay's *The Jews of Germany: A Historical Portrait* covers German Jewry from its origins in the Roman empire to its dissolution in the Third Reich. The book includes hundreds of illustrations, cartoons, and photographs, as well as brief excerpts from documents and memoirs. To say that this is a coffee-table book of a very high order is to capture its visual attractiveness and interest, testimony to the author's archival resourcefulness. But its great merit lies in the narrative, which summarizes a good deal of recent scholarship in a brief and accessible manner.

The pictorial emphasis of the book means that the ritual, ceremonial, and folkloric elements of Jewish life—what historians now call "material culture"—are highlighted. Mrs. Gay also devotes considerable attention to the men and women of Jewish origin who contributed to German culture. Unfortunately, she scants the contributions of German Jews to the intellectual history of *Judaism* in Germany, but this is a minor limitation in a book which provides not only a fine introduction to its subject but visual delights even for those already familiar with it.

LONG the preserve of Jewish historians, German Jewry has recently gained the attention of non-Jewish historians as well. Among the most novel contributions has been that of Dietz Bering, a German linguist by training. His newly-translated book (first published in German in 1987) serves as a historical refutation of the adage that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me."

Until the early 19th century, most Jews in Central Europe did not have surnames; they were known to one another by their given names and by their patronymics (as, indeed, Jews today continue to be known for religious purposes). It was the modern, bu-

JERRY Z. MULLER *teaches modern European history at the Catholic University of America. His new book,* Adam Smith in His Time and Ours: Designing the Decent Society, *has just been published by the Free Press.*



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reaucratic state which for administrative reasons demanded that they take permanent surnames. In Prussia, this happened in 1812 as part of the process by which Jews were admitted to citizenship by the reformist government of the day. Thereafter, they were required to submit any proposed change of surname or first name to the Prussian (and later German) government for approval. Such applications often contained extensive descriptions of the applicant's plight by reason of his existing name.

Bering has examined these requests for name changes in an effort to plot the course both of Jewish attempts at assimilation and of the changing attitude of Germans toward the prospect of such assimilation. For, far from being a routine matter, a request to transform one's name was subject to the vicissitudes of bureaucratic policy, which in turn reflected the relative willingness of Germans at various moments to accept the integration of Jews into their society. Both the attempt to change one's name and the bureaucratic measures adopted to encourage or, especially, frustrate such an attempt, serve the historian as a barometer of anti-Semitism in day-to-day German life.

When first compelled to take surnames, Jews typically adopted either their Hebrew patronymic (such as Moses, Levy, Hirsch, or Isaak) or a name that recalled it (such as Markus in place of Mordechai). Some also changed their first names, again choosing German names with identical initial letters (such as Moritz in place of Moses).

By the second half of the 19th century, however, these names too had become stigmatized as Jewish, and a round of name-changing began in which Jews gave up the principle of consonance in favor of names that would be entirely inconspicuous. Among the most frequently abandoned names, Bering shows, was Isidor, a Greek name that had been adopted by many Jews because of its consonance with the traditional Isaac, Israel, or Itzig. (In a chapter which he has since expanded into a separate book, Bering relates how during the 1920's Joseph Goebbels, then the Nazi propaganda chief in Berlin, launched an extended campaign against the Jewish chief of police, Bernhard Weiss, by branding him "Isidor.")

In the earlier part of the century Jews had been for the most part easily recognizable not only by their names but by their distinctive language (Yiddish), clothes, and style of dress. Compelling them to take surnames was part of a larger effort on the part of Prussian reformers to transform the Jews into good—and, ultimately, Christian—Germans. In time, however, as Jews adopted the dress and manners of others, anti-Semites began to complain that they were becoming *too* inconspicuous, and to press for the maintenance of Jewish distinctiveness—by, among other things, preventing them from "escaping" their Jewish or Jewish-sounding names.

Bering shows how this new and increasingly racial anti-Semitism was incorporated into the practice of the German bureaucracy. As early as the 1830's, a now-reactionary Prussian government was trying to force Jews to retain their old names. By 1900, even those of Jewish origin who had been baptized were being prevented from changing their Jewish names, while Germans of non-Jewish origin were allowed to change *their* names if they sounded too "Jewish."

How many Jews did, in fact, try to change their names? Though anti-Semites, convinced that Jews were trying to disguise their origins, believed the numbers were large, in fact this was not so. Name-changing was perceived by most Jews themselves as a form of abandonment of Jewish identity. Their aversion to the practice accounts for the frequency of this theme in Jewish humor of the period, second only to outright apostasy. That the requests came in by the thousands despite this strong negative sentiment testifies to the pressures felt by Jews with stigmatized names. Thus, one Wolff Itzig of Danzig wrote plaintively to the Ministry of the Interior early in the 20th century, enclosing

> with my petition a number of documents from firms which all declared themselves unable to engage my son since his name was offensive.

The laws regulating names were liberalized under the Weimar Republic in the 1920's, but the old bureaucratic practice was not only resumed but intensified in the Third Reich. The penultimate chapter in the story came in 1938, when Hitler's National-Socialist government forced all Jews without distinctively Jewish first names to adopt the name Israel for men and Sara for women. Finally, Jews were forced to display their distinctiveness through the yellow star, before being reduced to numbers in order to be reduced to ashes.

The Stigma of Names is based upon painstaking research, and at its best conveys to the reader that peculiar kind of anxious excitement which can come from experiencing the past through its archival remains. The answers a historian finds in archives are only as good as the questions he brings to his research, and Bering's questions are very good indeed. All the more regrettable, then, that *The Stigma of Names* is written in a wooden and academic style, often overly abstract and indirect in expression. Although the text of the English version has been slightly abridged (and the notes more so), its style reflects the German original, and the too-literal translation only exacerbates the difficulties of the original. Yet despite its stylistic infelicities, this is still a book worth reading.

In the end, there are no simple lessons for Americans in general, and American Jews in particular, to learn from the history of Jews in Germany. The differences between the political cultures of the two nations are more striking than their similarities. Still, it is worth noting that in recent years even American Jews were reminded of the power of names when a presidential contender complained of his difficulties in "Hymietown." Those inclined to dismiss the importance of such characterizations ought to consult *The Stigma of Names*.

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Bush/Baker & Gorbachev

AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS: THE INSIDE STORY OF THE END OF THE COLD WAR. By MICHAEL R. BESCHLOSS and STROBE TALBOTT. *Little, Brown. 496 pp. $24.95.*

Reviewed by
ANGELO M. CODEVILLA

IN 1989 the historian Michael Beschloss and the journalist Strobe Talbott

> quietly asked a large number of American and Soviet officials if they would speak with us on a regular basis about what was happening within and between their two governments; many consented, on the condition that we not identify them as sources.

The result, *At the Highest Levels*, is less a book than a compilation of memos on conversations. It may also be an unprecedented triumph of tattletaling. And since President Clinton has appointed one of the authors, Strobe Talbott, as his super-envoy to Eurasia, it may be, as well, a guide to future U.S. policy. But this does not make it history.

The authors do not feel obliged to provide logical transitions between paragraphs, let alone between incidents, which follow one another without evident rhyme or reason. Nor, as they go along, do the authors make explicit judgments about whether their *dramatis personae* are telling the truth or lying, are judging or acting wisely or foolishly. Not until the very end do they summarily lay out their own views on the things they have been writing about. These turn out to be neither more nor less than the views of former Secretary of State James Baker and former President George Bush: namely, that the end of the cold war came about through the foreign policy of the Bush administration toward the regime of Mikhail Gorbachev. In the authors' words:

> From January 1989 through December 1991, [George Bush] coaxed the Soviet Union toward worldwide surrender. He did so largely by exercising restraint and refraining from pushing the Soviet government too hard, thus never giving Moscow a pretext to reverse course.

The Bush team believed, and the authors concur, that Gorbachev swallowed the reunification of Germany and did not order Soviet troops to shoot the crowds that brought down the Berlin Wall, Eastern Europe's Communist regimes, and ultimately the Soviet Union itself because U.S. policy was so artfully accommodating. But this is sheer nonsense. In the first place, by the time the Bush team put its stamp on U.S.-Soviet relations in the summer of 1989, the Soviet regime's internal decay, aggravated by Gorbachev's incompetence, had passed the point of no return. Not the least decisive of these developments was Gorbachev's announcement that local First Secretaries, the country's centurions, would have to stand for election—an act that broke whatever still remained of Communist-party discipline. From the summer of 1989 on, had any Soviet official issued an order to make civil or international war, the order might well not have been obeyed, and surely would have plunged the regime into mortal crisis. Gorbachev, in other words, was responding far less to Bush than to a domestic situation he could no longer control.

But in the second place, the premise of this book—that the Bush and Gorbachev teams comanaged the disappearance of the Soviet Union—is the reverse of the truth. Not only did Gorbachev do everything in his power to keep the Soviet Union alive, but so did Bush. Indeed, *At the Highest Levels* itself shows that the administration supported Gorbachev's Soviet Union to the very end, to the point of affronting both the powerless Baltic peoples suffering under Gorbachev's crackdown and also the great mass of Russians and Ukrainians (the latter soon to become the world's third largest nuclear power). True, the authors concede that maybe Bush and Baker persevered in their commitment to Gorbachev and the Soviet Union a bit too long. But the commitment itself was anything but tactical. It was the very essence of the administration's vision of U.S.-Soviet relations.

THAT vision, rather than any particular results, explains the U.S. position in the negotiations chronicled in this book. These had to do primarily with arms control and Eastern Europe.

Beschloss and Talbott report the long train of U.S.-Soviet arms-control negotiations as a series of victories by Bush and Baker, Gorbachev and his Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, over the "hardliners" in their respective camps. At the same time, they praise Bush and Baker for forcing bold, unprecedented U.S. concessions. What were these concessions, and by what standard were they a good thing?

The U.S. entered into the arms-control process in the late 1960's in order to prevent the Soviet Union from acquiring enough warheads with the combination of yield and accuracy to carry out a disarming first strike. The Soviets then had some 300 such warheads, and there were some 2,000 points in the U.S. against which they might have been used. Hence the "bottom-line" ratio of Soviet "counterforce" warheads to U.S. strategic targets was a relatively benign one to seven.

In the 1970's, arms control earned a bad reputation when the Soviet Union, despite the treaties it had concluded with us, built up the ratio to a very threatening three to one. Then came the START I treaty (concluded in 1991), which provided for a big cut in the number of Soviet warheads but also for a proportionally bigger cut in the number of things—e.g., submarines and missile sites—against which they might be aimed. Thus, under START, even without cheating, the Soviets would have seen their ratio rise to perhaps eight to one.

During negotiations for START II, which called for still deeper cuts, the Soviet side argued that

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ANGELO M. CODEVILLA *is a fellow of the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and the author of, most recently,* Informing Statecraft: Intelligence for a New Century.

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it should be allowed to make reductions not by destroying its missiles but rather by "offloading," i.e., removing five warheads from missiles that could carry six. And although it promised to do away with the most dangerous class of missile, the SS-18, it wanted to retain 90 silo launchers for them. Even Bush's National Security Adviser, Brent Scowcroft, a devotee of arms control, objected that the U.S. had no means of knowing how many warheads were on any given missile or which silos contained missiles at any given time. The net effect, Scowcroft warned, might be to enable the Soviet military to wipe out American strategic forces with a fraction of their own.

It is not difficult to imagine why the Soviet military would want such a deal. But why did Bush embrace it? Because he believed, along with the authors, that allowing Gorbachev to brandish U.S. concessions at home would mute the hostility of the Soviet military to his reforms. There is, however, no evidence that Gorbachev thought this way, or that this was the reason the Soviet military stood by as the Soviet system disintegrated from within. As for the American side, the best one can say for these militarily indefensible treaties is that the political collapse of Communism may render them irrelevant.

Now consider Eastern Europe. The authors report Bush as saying, in the aftermath of the Malta summit of December 1989, "that given a choice between the success of perestroika and German unity in the near future, he himself would choose perestroika." At that summit he also told Gorbachev, despite the official U.S. position on the subject, that he would do nothing to support the independence of the Baltic states "so long as Soviet tanks do not roll." A year later they did roll, and Bush still stuck with Gorbachev.

Before and after the Malta conference, even as the peoples of Eastern Europe were demanding the immediate withdrawal of all Soviet troops, the Bush administration was trying to negotiate long-term parity between U.S. and Soviet troops in Europe as a whole. When visiting the region, the authors tell us, Bush felt more comfortable with Communist rulers than with their democratic opponents. Thus, not only did Bush not "dance on the [Berlin] Wall," he was actually pursuing the old notion of trading an effective American acquiescence in Soviet predominance over Eastern Europe for promises of nonviolence and stability. During the 1970's this had been known as the Sonnenfeldt doctrine. Earlier, simply as Yalta.

IN SUM, the Bush team never understood the Soviet regime's internal troubles or how these troubles constrained Soviet foreign policy. While Bush & Co. parroted Gorbachev's talk of free-market reforms, the Soviet leader was trying to extend the state's control over black- (read, free-) market transactions. While the Bush team, echoed here by Beschloss and Talbott, was considering Boris Yeltsin beneath notice, the Russian people, as well as those of the Baltics and Ukraine, were seeing Yeltsin as their best hope against Communist tyranny. Beginning in the spring of 1990, as Gorbachev turned to the armed forces and the KGB in a belated attempt to maintain the Soviet Union the only way it could be maintained, the Bush team, seconded here by the authors, worried chiefly about helping him to succeed.

By that time even the bureaucrats at the State Department and CIA had figured out that America's interests did not coincide with Gorbachev's and that the U.S. should not try to pay for Soviet concessions which history was in the process of giving us for free. Bush & Co., however, were rejoicing that Gorbachev had shown them the "twinkle in his eye, and sometimes even an actual wink."

Not even the death of the USSR ended the attraction of U.S.-Soviet relations for Bush & Co., or for Beschloss and Talbott. To the end of its own days the administration mourned Gorbachev and resented Yeltsin. It spurned Yeltsin's January 1992 proposal that America and Russia simply stop targeting their missiles on one another, preferring instead to conclude START II. More ominously still, the Bush administration put pressure on Ukraine to surrender its nuclear weapons to Russia, mindless of the deterrent effect these weapons have had on the increasingly powerful military-industrial types within Russia who want to recreate the Soviet Union under another name, and who might be willing to wage war to do it.

AS ONE of the Clinton administration's principal sources of ideas on Eurasia, Strobe Talbott can be expected to prescribe more of what this book endorses: the costly, incompetent, and failed policies of Bush/Baker. For that reason alone, the book he has written with Michael Beschloss is worth reading.

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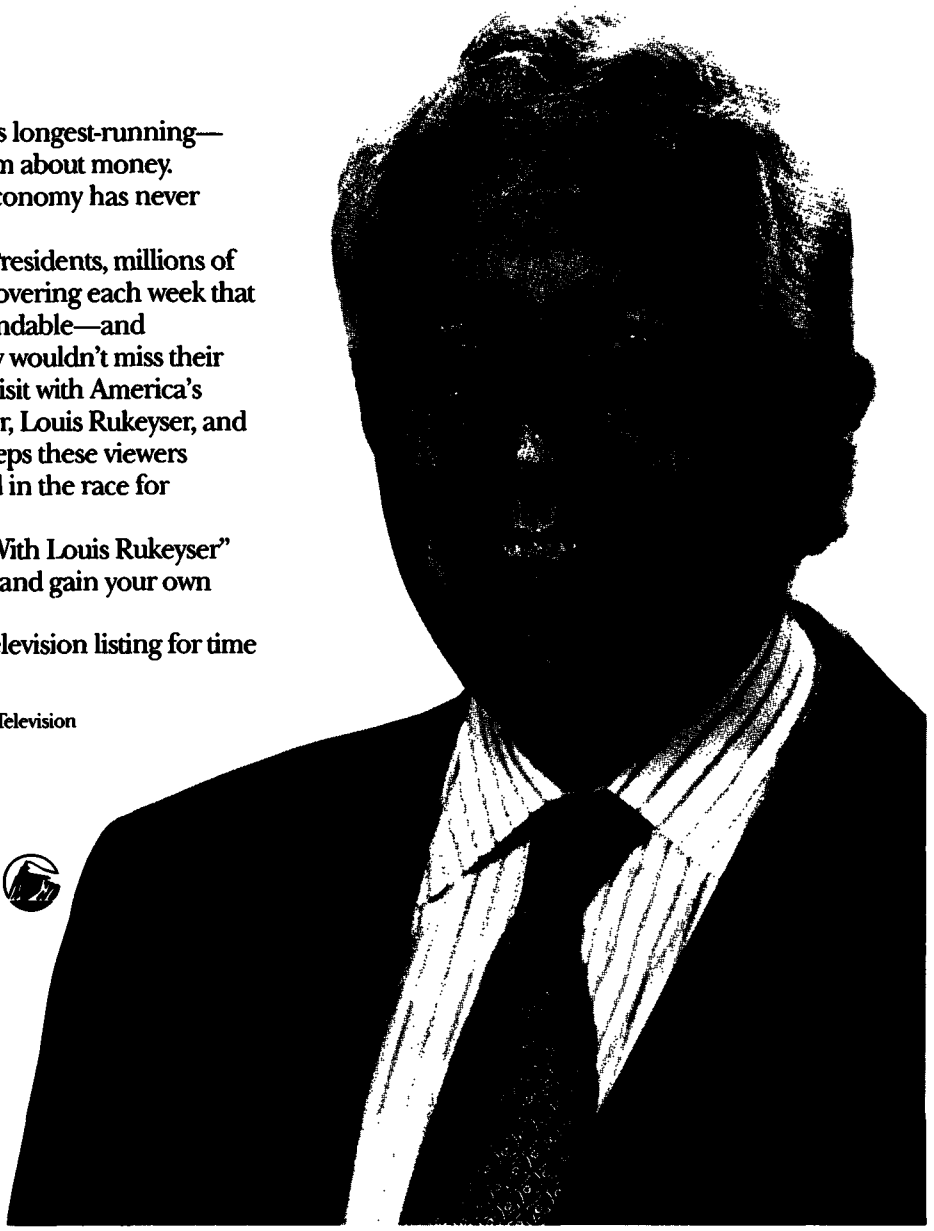

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